NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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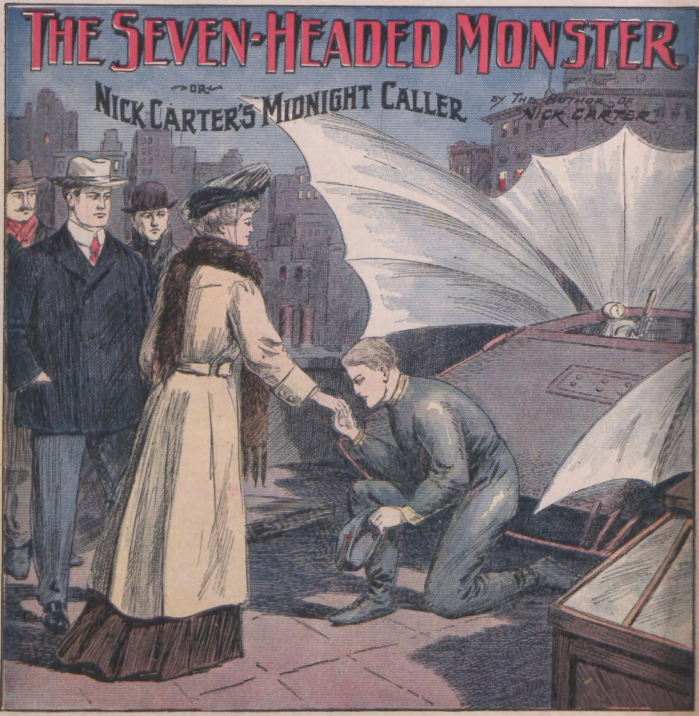
No. 538 NEW YORK, APRIL 20, 1907. Price, Five Cents

THE SEVEN-HEADED MONSTER

OR NICK CARTER'S MIDNIGHT CALLER

BY THE AUTHOR OF NICK CARTER



Legayah bent before his queen with stately courtesy, and took her hand and kissed it. "We are ready, Idayah," he said.

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The Seven-headed Monster;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S MIDNIGHT CALLER.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MESSAGE ON THE FLOOR.

Nick Carter looked down at the thing on the floor in front of him, shrugged his shoulders, smiled grimly, and read aloud:

"Zanabayah, the Terrible."

It was a plain, white sheet of letter-paper of the ordinary size, and the inscription was printed across it in red —crayon red; printed in large, glaring letters which somehow had a foreign twist to them in spite of the effort that had evidently been made to render them entirely natural.

And this was only the day following the close of his last case in which Zanabayah had figured so prominently; a case which had closed in a personal struggle between "the embodied Satan," as Zanabayah was often called, and Ten-Ichi, in which the latter had crept upon the fiend from behind and with this advantage had overcome him by the exercise of his knowledge of the ju-jutsu science.*

*See No. 537 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "Zanabayah, the Terrible."

But more than that—and this was what was passing through Nick Carter's mind at the moment; what made him shrug his shoulders and smile rather uneasily—Nick had just entered his own house, having arrived from a trip down-town to the Central Office of police, where he had seen, as he supposed, Zanabayah locked in a cell and under strict guard; and to render the circumstance even more remarkable, Ten-Ichi was one of that guard over the fiend and had been there since the moment the man was put there.

And yet here, when Nick returned to his home, ascended the stairs, and entered his private study—here was a sheet of paper on the floor in front of him, bearing the name in red crayon: *"Zanabayah, the Terrible."*

Nick took the paper from the floor and looked at it more closely; then he held it up to the light and studied the water-mark; then he laid it carelessly on the table, and, striding across the room to the window, he stood there with his hands clasped behind him, looking out upon nothing in particular—but thinking.

The time was three o'clock in the afternoon.

He had lunched at one o'clock and had gone out im-

mediately after that. At two he had stopped for a short time at police headquarters. While there he had gone down to the cell where Zanabayah was confined, because he wished to exchange a few words with Ten-Ichi, who had been made one of the members of the guard of three that had been placed over the prisoner; and this at his own request.

And Zanabayah had been there at the time, for Nick had spoken to him and had been answered; and there had never been a doubt or the thought of a doubt in the mind of the detective respecting the identity of the man who was a prisoner.

It is true that at the time he was arrested—overcome by Ten-Ichi in the struggle they had together, Zanabayah had been made up to represent Nick's friend Gerald Starbuck; but he had been compelled to remove that disguise as soon as he was a prisoner, and he had then stood revealed to the police in his own proper person—at least as they knew that person—of Zanabayah.

Tall, lithe, supple, handsome, with flashing black eyes, aquiline features, gleaming white teeth, haughty bearing, indifferent manner—and always with a devilish smile of derision and impudence; it had never occurred to the detective that there could be any mistake about his identity.

There was no such idea in his mind now.

Nick had never supposed that Zanabayah was in the country alone; without ample assistance to aid him in carrying out his devilish work.

Indeed, the detective had had ample proof of that fact, for even now, in the Tombs there was one of his followers—a fellow who had impersonated his master to the point of receiving a bullet through his hand from the pistol of Nick Carter.

That wasn't exactly the thing that was puzzling Nick at this particular moment, although it should freely be admited that he thought of it more than once as he stood there near the window looking out at nothing.

The question in the mind of the detective was, how did that paper get into the room where he found it?

The room was Nick Carter's study.

We all are familiar with the almost sacredness with which he preserved the privacy of that particular room.

Only his especial friends were ever asked to enter it; to be asked there by the detective for any purpose whatever was equivalent to an announcement of intimate friendship on his part.

"How did the paper get here?"

That is what he was engaged in asking himself.

Joseph, Nick's valet, had been—doubtless all the time since the detective went out—in his accustomed place in the lower hall, for he filled the position of butler as well as valet to the detective.

The door of Nick's study locked with a spring lock. There were only three keys to that lock, of which Joseph carried one, Chick another, and Nick himself the third.

It was the month of June, to be sure, and the study-window was open to admit the soft air of summer; but the room was on the second floor of the house, at the rear; the block was a solid one all around that square; and, anyhow, it was absurd to suppose that at that hour of the day any person would have had the hardihood to have dared to enter surreptitiously the house and the private room of Nick Carter, the detective.

And yet, some person had been there.

At least, that sheet of paper had been left there.

It had not—it could not, have done so—come there of its own volition. Sheets of paper haven't wings with which to fly about, nor have they brains with which to direct themselves.

The paper was there. It had been written upon, or, rather, printed upon, with red crayon, and it had been intended to convey a message to the detective.

A message of what?

The detective smiled to himself again, and once more shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course," he mused, "it was intended to give me the impression that Zanabayah is still at large, notwithstanding my belief that he is at this moment in a prison cell at police headquarters; and equally, of course, the thing has been done by direction of Zanabayah, and by one of his followers.

"But *how?* How was it done? That is the question?

"The house is locked—was locked. Joseph is on duty—was on duty, doubtless, all the time, in the hall below.

"This room was locked, as it always is locked when I am not inside of it."

He turned rather impatiently and pressed the button which called Joseph to him; and when, a moment later, the valet entered the room, Nick said to him:

"Who has been here since I went out, immediately after luncheon?"

"No one, sir," was the instant reply.

"Are you quite sure of that, Joseph?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I will tell you that you are mistaken. Somebody *has* been here. Somebody has been in this room. Somebody has left a message for me, *here*. How do you account for it, Joseph?"

"I cannot understand it at all."

"Were you absent from the house at all while I was out?"

"Yes, sir. I went to the drug-store; but I was not gone more than a quarter of an hour."

"Well, even so, you did not leave the house alone, or the front door unattended to, did you? I have never known you to do that."

"No, sir. I called the housekeeper. She said that she would attend to the bell, if it rang while I was out."

"Did she mention that any person had called during your absence?"

"On the contrary, she assured me that nobody had called."

"That will do, Joseph. Thank you. You may send Chick to me, if you will."

"I hope, sir, that I have not been remiss in my duties? I should not like to think that."

"No, Joseph. You are never that. I know that. It is only another Zanabayah mystery; that is all."

"Zanabayah, sir? I thought he was locked in a cell at police headquarters."

"So did I, Joseph. In fact, I saw him there—or thought I did—less than an hour ago."

"Then it could not have been he, sir."

"No—I don't think so—but it might have been one of his followers. I suppose he has many of them in the city, although, as a matter of fact, I am only sure of the presence of one—and he is also locked up at the present moment."

"Pardon me, sir; but are you *sure* that somebody has been here? Is it not possible——"

The detective pointed toward the sheet of paper which was still lying on the table.

"That was left here during my absence," he said. "I found it lying in the middle of the floor, face up, staring at me when I entered the room."

Joseph regarded the sheet of paper with the red printing on it, as if it were a snake; at last he said:

"I know nothing about it, sir."

"I did not suppose you did when I called you to me. But I wished to make sure that you had not admitted any person to the house. Where are my guests?"

"Mr. Starbuck and madam are in their rooms, sir. They have not appeared since luncheon."

"Very good. You need not disturb them now unless either of them should start to go out. In that case say to them or to either of them that I would like to speak with both of them before they go upon the street again."

"Yes, sir."

"And now, send Chick to me. After that, when I ring twice, you may ask Mr. Starbuck to come to me here—no, *Mrs.* Starbuck."

"Yes, sir."

"Now you may go. Tell Chick at once."

It was only a moment later when Chick entered the room and closed the door after him; and as he stepped toward the center of the room Nick pointed again at the sheet of paper lying upon the table, and Chick took it in his hand and examined it.

"What do you make of it?" the detective asked at last.

"It looks to me," replied Chick, "like Zanabayah the Terrible."

"So it is; so it is, Chick. Really, you should wear a medal on your breast for superhuman penetration. But I did not ask the question idly. The paper was here in the middle of the floor when I entered the room a short time ago. Nobody has called. I had just come from headquarters, where I exchanged a few words with Zanabayah himself. How did it get inside this room? You haven't been trying to play some sort of a joke on me, have you?"

"Do you think that I would do such a thing as that, Nick?"

"No, I don't. But the paper was there, Chick."

Chick raised his right hand and pointed silently toward the open window.

CHAPTER II.

SEVEN LIVING DANGERS.

The detective turned toward the window, was silent a moment, and then turned back again to his assistant.

"I have thought about that," he said. "I quite realize that it would be the only way; *was* the only way, in fact; and yet—it seems preposterous."

"Why?"

"Well, even if Zanabayah had brought to this country, from the Sacred Valley, one of his flying-machines, he would hardly make use of it right here in the city of New York in the middle of a midsummer day."

"Have you forgotten that those machines can be made practically invisible?"

"No; I have forgotten nothing."

"Well, if it is the only way, it must be *the* way."

Nick shook his head.

"It isn't the *only* way," he said. "There is one other. We weren't in the Sacred Valley long enough to have had any practical experience with the messenger-pigeons they use there; we did not even see any of them, that I remember; but you will recall the fact that long ago, when we first knew about Idayah and Starbuck, that she used the messenger birds, trained in her country, to carry messages to the man she loved."

"Yes. I do remember; but I had forgotten for the moment."

"They raise in her country, you will remember, a breed of carrier-pigeons which are trained to carry messages to, as well as from, distances. They are like our own carrier-pigeons, only they are very much wiser and better trained. Idayah told me about them once. She said that in order to teach a bird to carry a message to a certain place, the bird had to be taken to that place at least once, and there taught a word which represented that particular place to its intelligence. For example, if a bird had been brought to this room and were taught to associate this room with the name 'Nick,' it would thereafter bring a message here that was fastened to it, if that word were mentioned to it."

"Well? What more do you want to explain——"

"I want a lot more, Chick. In the first place, not one of those birds would come here with a message unless

it had been here once before; and I am very certain that not one of those birds has ever been in this room. But, anyhow, I don't see that it does us any sort of good to speculate as to how the message came here. It is sufficient that it is here."

"Yes."

"And that it wasn't placed here for nothing."

"Evidently not."

"It is intended to remind us that Zanabayah is not down and out yet. *As a matter of fact, Chick, we are not even sure that it is Zanabayah who is in prison now.*"

"Eh?"

"The man we suppose to be Zanabayah may be another impersonator of him, just as is that fellow who is now in the Tombs. Don't forget that until I knew better, I thought that *he* was Zanabayah."

Chick nodded. Then he said:

"Possibly Idayah might be able to throw some light upon this puzzle."

"Possibly. I have thought of that; and yet—I dislike to disturb her serenity again. She has seemed so much more at ease since Zanabayah—or the man we suppose to be him—has been locked up. Only this morning they talked of going to their own apartments, which are now ready for them, only that I insisted upon their remaining my guests for another week."

"All the same, I would call her here and let her know all about it. She has got nerve enough. I have never seen her show the white feather yet."

"Nor I."

Nick pressed the button in the wall. Five minutes later there was a gentle tap at the door, and Idayah Starbuck—she who was once Idayah, the goddess—entered the room, smiling brightly upon her friends who were awaiting her. A beautiful woman, in all the glow of youth and health and young motherhood; once a queen, once worshiped as a goddess in her own country; the object of the bitter hatred and undying enmity and vengeance of Zanabayah the Terrible.

"This would seem to be a cosultation," she said lightly, as she entered and dropped into the chair which Nick indicated to her.

"It is," replied the detective. "It is a business consultation."

"A serious one?" she inquired brightly.

"That depends; yes, I think it is rather serious."

"Zanabayah again?"

"Yes."

"What is it now, Nick?"

"This." And the detective handed her the sheet of paper with the red-crayon printing upon it.

Just a suggestion of pallor crossed her countenance when she looked upon the paper; but it was instantly succeeded by a flush of anger, and she exclaimed:

"The villain! He has dared to use the royal prerogative!"

"Eh?" said Nick. "How is that, Idayah?"

"The red crayon. Only the royal household may use it in conveying an order. He has dared to make use of it in writing his name."

"The point is, Idayah, do you think that *he* wrote it himself?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Why?"

"None of his followers, however bold, would dare to use that pigment."

"And yet it isn't an hour since I left police headquarters, and while there I saw and talked with Zanabayah—or with the man whom we suppose to be Zanabayah."

"Well?" she asked, smiling again.

"When I returned from there I found that paper in the middle of the floor of this room, which was locked and which is always kept locked. Now, there are two questions: If Zanabayah made those characters on that paper, how did he get it out of his prison cell after he had done it? And, supposing that he could get it out of his cell—which I do not admit—how was it brought to this room and left here for me to discover?"

Idayah pointed toward the open window, as Chick had done.

"Well?" asked Nick.

"It came through that window, of course," said Idayah.

"You are replying to the second question first; but we will proceed with it. Tell me how it could come through that window?"

"There are several ways in which the people of my country could have brought it here or sent it here."

Nick nodded.

"I have thought of two of them," he said, "but both seem to be rather out of the question."

"You have probably not thought of the most likely one at all. But tell me how you have tried to explain it."

"I have thought of your messenger birds; but I am reminded that not one of your messenger birds has ever been in this room; and, if that is so, one of them would not know how to find it."

"That is quite true. I do not think the paper was brought here by a messenger bird."

"I have thought of the flying machines. But we do not know—in fact, we do not think that Zanabayah brought one of those machines here with him. We decided, you and I, that he came without one of them; and even if——"

"I do not think it was a flying-machine. I do not think there is one in this country, except that one which we presented to the government, and it is now in Washington."

"That brings me to the end of my conjectures," said Nick, laughing. "I give it up."

"You have forgotten, entirely, one thing, Nick," said Idayah, fixing her dark eyes upon him and smiling as if she were not at all disturbed by the incident.

"I suppose I have forgot a lot, as a matter of fact. But what especial thing do you now refer to that I have forgotten?"

"A very necessary part of those same flying-machines, which I have explained to you more than once."

"Possibly. What is it?"

"The compressed gas we use in the Sacred Valley. The wonderful lifting power—to you who had never known about it before—of that gas; the aerial clothing we wear when we voyage in the 'dumb-birds,' as we call them."

"I remember. I am catching on now, Idayah."

"Just try to recall to your mind things that I have explained to you about that powder—which is a residuum of currieonium—from which the gas is produced. It's lifting power is equal, as you have been told, to its bulk in common stone. We do not call it a lifting power, however. We give it another name which signifies, if it were translated into your language, that it neutralizes the attraction of gravitation. Its lifting power being equal in weight to its bulk in stone, it follows that if we had here in this room a bag of that compressed gas equal in size to your body, it would reduce your weight to nothing at all, and you would rest as lightly on the floor as if you were a feather. I do not intend to suggest that you are made of stone, but that is the rimilie which I think you will understand best."

"I remember about the powder now."

"Very well. Then remember also that although your weight would be reduced, your strength would remain the same. If you stood outside of this house on the street, and if you had in your possession in a bag concealed in your clothing a sufficient quantity of that gas to reduce your weight to a minimum, you would, with an ordinary cane and with your strength applied to it, propel yourself into the air—in other words, jump into the air to a window of the second floor. The front room on this floor is your own room. I suppose the windows there are open, also. It would be a very easy matter to pass through the house from the front room to the bathroom, and thence from one window to another, and so enter this room."

"It *sounds* easy," said Nick, smiling. "I suppose we will have to admit that it is the way the thing was done, Idayah."

"It *is* the way it was done."

"Well, anyhow, the note is here. Perhaps now you will reply to the first question."

"What was that?"

"If Zanabayah wrote those words on that paper, how did the paper get out of his cell?"

"It did not get out of the cell," she replied.

"Eh?" exclaimed Chick, who was listening intently.

"It was never in the cell," she said.

"Then Zanabayah——"

"Zanabayah is at large; that is all. It was not Zanabayah at all whom you arrested and took to the cell. It was one of his sons."

"One of—his *sons?*"

"Yes. There are six of them."

"Oh. I see. Six sons, eh? And Zanabayah! That makes seven. And the chap who came here to this house, whom Ten-Ichi tackled, who had made himself up to represent your husband, and over whom we have so carefully placed a guard at headquarters, is not Zanabayah at all. He is only one of the six sons of that fiend."

"That is it," said Idayah.

"Well, will you tell me why you have not informed us of all this before, Idayah?"

"Because I did not know it. Because I had no more idea of it than you had. Because I supposed, as sincerely as you did, that the man you arrested and took to prison was Zanabayah himself."

"But now——"

"Now I think that Zanabayah is as great a menace to us as he ever was."

CHAPTER III.

THE SEVEN-HEADED MONSTER.

"You have never told me about these sons of Zanabayah," said the detective, after a short pause.

"If you will stop a moment to think," replied Idayah, "you will remember that I have not really had an opportunity."

"I admit that."

"It is only the day before yesterday that my husband and I returned from Europe. I called here to see you at eight o'clock in the morning to tell you that I had been haunted for months by Zanabayah, and that I know that some day he would strike; that he had made his presence known to me only that I might suffer by anticipation of what he might some day do to me and mine. It was then that you really heard about Zanabayah for the first time; and since then we have both been kept rather busy. There hasn't been a chance, has there, Nick, to tell you about the sons of Zanabayah?"

"No; tell me now."

"Really, I hardly know what to tell you."

"Just tell me what you know about them."

"I only know that there are six of them; that they all look exactly alike—or by some magic of Zanabayah's are made to look alike—and that they all look exactly like their father."

"Humph!" said Nick; and was silent.

"You know yourself that Zanabayah—the Zanabayah you have seen——"

"That is just the point. I am not at all sure now that I *have* ever seen him at all."

"Nor am I; nor am I sure that I have ever seen him; nor have I ever been sure when I did see that it was really Zanabayah that I saw."

"What were you saying?"

"You know yourself that Zanabayah looks as young as if he himself were one of the sons. Or if you do not know it, I can assure you of the truth of that statement. His appearance, as I know him, is that of a man of less than thirty."

"Well?"

"That man you saw in our rooms at the hotel—you thought he was Zanabayah—the man you shot through the hand."

"By Jove! I will know *him* the next time I see him, anyhow. I marked him."

Idayah smiled.

"His wound will heal even more quickly than the wound of a cat. It will leave no scar. Tell me, you have seen many of our people—of my people—did you ever see one who bore a scar?"

"No," admitted the detective.

"The vitic force, Nick—the great principle of life. It is a healing quality as well as a life-giving one. Have you seen that man in the Tombs since you shot him?"

"No."

"Have you inquired about his wound?"

"No."

"If you will take the trouble to do so, I think you will find that the physician who attended upon him is greatly puzzled by the rapidity with which the wound has healed. I think you will discover that the wound has already entirely healed, and that the doctor is now engaged in writing a treatise upon the subject for the medical journal. It is the vitic force—the vitic principle."

"Well; never mind that. It makes small difference to me whether the wound has healed or not. Get back to the subject of those six sons. Are you sure there aren't seven of them?"

"There are six. There have always been six of them, it seems. They are all exactly alike; and they are all counterparts of the father—when Zanabayah himself is not posing on some other character. You remember what you said once about him?"

"I have said a lot about him; and, by the same token, I have thought a lot about him that I have not said," replied Nick grimly.

Idayah laughed aloud.

"I do not doubt it," she said. "But you once likened him to the mythological god, Jove, who could change himself or others, at will, into toads or elephants, mice or lions, beasts or birds. Zanabayah cannot do that; but he can change his own appearance so quickly and so perfectly as to defy the penetration of human eyes—even your own."

"That is no dream, either. He did that once, and fooled me."

"He has trained those sons to be interchangeable with himself, if I may use that term."

"It seems to be an appropriate one, all right."

"And so, for years, in the Sacred Valley, it has been that we never knew when Zanabayah was present with us, or if it was not one of the sons with whom we had been talking."

"And they are devils, fiends, like himself, I suppose?"

"Naturally."

"Well, it is a little bit of satisfaction to think that at this moment we know where at least two of them are."

"Yes. You know that—for the present."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that Zanabayah will move heaven and earth to get his two sons out of prison."

"And I will double the guard over them, if possible, to see that they do not get out."

"Nevertheless——"

"Never mind the nevertheless. What are the names of those sons."

"I do not know."

"Haven't they got names?"

"Not that I have ever known or heard; or, if they have names at all, they are all called by their father's name."

"That would make them all Zanabayahs, eh?"

"Zanabayah the First; Zanabayah the Second; Zanabayah the Third, and so on ad infinitum," interjected Chick, laughing. "He is a regular octopus, Nick, for he has fourteen arms; a Medusa, only he has seven heads. Think of a man built like that, will you. Seven heads, fourteen arms, seventy fingers and toes, seven bodies, fourteen eyes, fourteen legs—*geel*"

"It sounds funny, Chick, but it seems to be literally true, for all that," said Nick gravely. "The worst of it is that there are also seven personalities; seven different men, and that when we chop one of them down, to speak figuratively, we haven't the least idea which one it may be; and there are always others to spring up in the place of the one who has fallen."

"Until we have done for the bunch," suggested Chick.

"Yes; until we have done away with all of them."

"And it looks to me very much as if that is exactly what we have got to do."

"It does."

Chick laughed, for there was a distinctly humorous side to it all, to him.

"You had better direct me to enter this case in the books under the caption of the Seven-Headed Monster," he said.

"Idayah," said the detective gravely, taking no notice of Chick's facetiousness, "the circumstance looks very grave to me as far as you are concerned. You are in very great danger; I suppose you realize that fully?"

"Yes," she said, "I do."

"It is greater than I ever supposed it could be. You and your year-old boy, Tonoyah, and your husband—frankly, I don't know how I am to protect you as I would like to do."

She was looking gravely into his eyes while he was speaking, and now she replied to him quite as seriously.

"I have always known, since we left the Sacred Valley in Nepal," she said, "that the day would come when these dangers would arise. I have always realized that some day Zanabayah would pursue me, and that when he did so, he would wreak a terrible vengeance upon me.

"When I told you about him that morning I did not tell you all. A woman dislikes to refer to things of the sort that I should have told; but always during the life of my father the king, Zanabayah was the one dreaded personage in all that country; the one man who was as powerful and as skilful with the sciences as my father himself. It was sometimes thought that he was more so."

"Yes."

"But there was always a danger that threatened me, of which I did not speak to you."

"I can guess what it is."

"Zanabayah always wanted me for his wife. Aside from any personal charms of my own which attracted him, he saw through me the way to the throne.

"My father was the last man of his race. I was literally the last of the race of kings who have ruled in the Sacred Valley since the world was young.

"Zanabayah wanted me, for through me was the way to the throne for him. As long as my father lived, I could defy the man; but as soon as my father passed away, that protection no longer existed.

"But with the death of my father, as you know, there came to the Sacred Valley Gerald Starbuck. I saw in him my savior. I married him, for it seemed that God had intended that he should appear there to save me, and we fell in love with each other. We were married almost at once.

"And then Gerald disappeared from the land. He ran away, it is true; but I followed him.

"You know the rest of the story. It is not necessary for me to repeat it."

"No."

"But even though he was absent, the fact that I was his wife protected me from Zanabayah; and I think that the fiend was content to wait until—as he supposed I would do—I had forgotten my love for Gerald.

"But then, when I, too, fled from the Sacred Valley, and later returned there with Gerald with me, Zanabayah was beside himself with anger. Nevertheless, he could better afford to wait still longer than he could to make open warfare against me and against my husband.

"But the last straw was broken in his patience when with you and Gerald I, too, left the valley forever. Zanabayah knew then that I would never return. He knew that I had no intention of returning.

"Probably he found no difficulty in making himself temporary ruler over the country; but that is not the same as being king in fact."

"Nor is it the same as possessing you as queen," said Chick.

Idayah flashed her eyes in his direction, and continued:

"Again the man waited patiently, until the time came when he thought he dared to leave the valley to come in search of me. And now he has come; and now——"

"Now," said the detective, "what, in your opinion, does he intend to do?"

"You have already had some illustration of his intentions," she replied. "He intends to make me his victim. He intends to make me *his*. He intends to make me wish to return to the Sacred Valley, even with a Zanabayah, or with anybody, to escape from——"

"Never mind, Idayah. I understand you. I know what the danger is."

"And I must be guarded, Nick. I will never be safe for one moment alone. It is not for my life that I fear."

"I know. I know."

"That—and my child. My son. I am not afraid, Nick. I am not one to be afraid. But I thoroughly realize all the horrors of the danger in which I stand."

"And, tell me, does Starbuck realize it all, too? Have you told him?"

"Certainly. He knows it all as well as I."

"Then, Idayah, being forewarned, we must also be forearmed. We must be ready and well prepared—and we will be!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGE MAN IN THE SQUARE.

"The question seems to be," said Chick, who was the first to recover from the seriousness that had fallen upon them, "what are we to do?"

"There seems to be nothing to do but wait," replied Nick. "The attack will be made here, when it is made. Every energy of Zanabayah will focus upon Idayah. It is here that the blow will fall. It is here that we must await it, and prepare for it as best we may."

"I think that is so," said Idayah.

"And now," said Nick, "a question."

"Yes," she replied, smiling at him, for she did not wish it to appear that she was afraid; nor, in truth, was she. She believed in the men who had sworn to protect her. She believed, perhaps, still more sincerely in her

own destiny; and surely God never created a woman so beautiful as Idayah to fall a victim to a fiend such as Zanabayah.

"It is this," continued the detective. "Before, when Zanabayah stole away the child, and when I went out in search of it, I directed Chick to disconnect the telephone wire and the electric wires that run into the house. I did it because I remembered that terrible knowledge of electricity that Zanabayah—that all your people—possesses. Tell me, would it be well to repeat that caution?"

"No," she replied. "It would be useless."

"Why?"

"You know, as well as I know, that the electric forces which is employed by the people of my country, is derived from the air. But we need not enter upon a scientific discussion. Leave the wires as they are, however."

It was at that moment that Starbuck entered the room and was informed of all that had taken place and of all that had been said; at the end of it he said:

"I quite agree with you, Nick, in regard to the precautions you intend to take, and I thank you for the guard that you will place around my wife. But I want you to know at once, all of you, that I am not going to hide my head under a bushel in order to avoid Zanabayah and his sons; not if there were an army of them. I shall walk the streets as I have always done."

"I think it is foolish of you, Starbuck," said the detective. "You have already had some taste of what he can do to you. And you know how he hates you."

"Because I am the husband of Idayah; yes."

"I think you should remain in the house with her. I think that you should remain by her side all the time, if for no other reason than merely to increase the number and strength of her guard by that much."

"Perhaps you are right. But, all the same——"

"Well?"

"All the same, I think that if I could just meet that fellow on the street once, and could get these big arms of mine around him, that I could squeeze the life out of him in no time."

"I could not do it when I seized upon him," said Nick.

"All the same, something tells me that I could do it—if only once I could get hold of him. He has never let me do that."

"He did me."

"Yes. I know that. And you received an electric shock from the contact which paralyzed you. I know."

"He would do the same to you. And you would fall into his power. He will not kill the child, your boy, for the reason that Tonoyah is the grandson of the king; he will not murder Idayah, for the reason that she is the daughter of the king, is, therefore, queen now, if she were back again in her own country, and for the added reason——"

"I know all about that added reason. You needn't mention it." He turned to his wife.

"Idayah," he said.

"Yes, Gerald," she replied.

"What is your advice to me? What is your wish about what I should do? I don't like to sit down here in Nick's house like an old empty stoughton-bottle and wait for that fiend in human guise to attack me. I want to go out and meet him on the level; and something tells me that I wouldn't have to go very far before I did meet him."

"My advice is for you to follow the dictates of your own will," she replied soberly. "If it is your idea that you should go out in the hope that you will meet Zanabayah—*go.*"

"And your wish," said Nick. "You have not told him that."

"My wish in the matter should make no difference."

Starbuck started to his feet.

"Here's a go," he said. "I am going to walk around the block."

"If you must do it, I will go with you," said Nick; and he also left his chair.

"And I——" began Chick; but his chief interrupted him.

"You, Chick, will remain here with Idayah. You are the captain of the guard. Patsy is in the house. He must be your assistant. I direct you both to remain within sight of her, if possible, and when not within sight, then within the sound of her voice. Come, Starbuck. I believe that a short walk will clear our brains a little."

The two left the house together and turned southward. They continued along the avenue to the square and crossed it toward the Fifth Avenue Hotel. They entered the hotel and purchased some cigars, which they lighted. Then they came out again and started across the square toward home.

"He hasn't shown up yet," said Starbuck, as they were passing the fountain in the middle of the oasis of the city.

"One of them is just about to do so," said the detective, very quietly and in a low tone. "If you will look directly ahead of you, you will see that a man is approaching us——"

"But that is not Zanabayah!" exclaimed Starbuck. "I know him well by sight. That is not he, although I will admit that——"

"You will admit that the man is from the country of the Sacred Valley, won't you?"

"Yes. I was just about to say that."

"Nowhere else in the world are there people who have the white-blonde hair, and at the same time the sloe-black eyes. That man is from the Sacred Valley."

"Yes."

"He has stopped. Let us do the same. I think he was

waiting for us to approach him. Now, we will wait where we are until he makes a move."

"But it isn't Zanabayah."

"It may not be Zanabayah, and again it may be. You know yourself that he can take on almost any shape he choses. His adeptness at disguising himself is as great as——"

"As your own?"

"Greater. His patience seems to be as great as ours. He seems determined to wait until we approach him."

"Let us do so. What is the use in waiting?"

"None, I suppose. Come along, then."

The man to whom they referred was, perhaps, a hundred feet away from them. He had come to a stop beside one of the benches, although he had not seated himself upon it. Instead, he was standing facing it, and apparently interested in something that he saw across the park. He was evidently trying to make it appear that he had not seen, or, at least, had not noticed, the detective and his companion.

But Nick was determined to speak to him; and when they had approached near enough, he reached out his hand and touched the man lightly on the shoulder.

He turned as if he had received an electric shock, and for a moment he stared angrily at the detective.

"Who are you, sir? And why do you accost me?" he demanded, in perfect English.

"I did so," replied Nick coolly, "because it occurred to me that we might be not unknown to each other."

"You are not unknown to me," was the equally cool reply; "but I fancy that I am to you. I have seen you before, but I do not think you ever saw me. However, you have recognized, because of my appearance, what country I am from."

"Yes. I think that is it."

"The man beside you——"

"The man beside me, sir, is Mr. Starbuck, in this country. Now, may I venture to ask who you are?"

"I am Legayah, sir," was the calm reply. "One of the Lords of Nobles, in the Sacred Valley. A faithful subject of our queen, wherever she may be. Is that sufficient?"

"Hardly—for I believe you to be Zanabayah; or one of his sons. Which are you?"

"I am as I have said—Legayah. I am here, in this country, against my will, but at the will of our people who sent me to guard Idayah against the machinations of Zanabayah, who is here with his sons to do her harm. I did not mean to tell you this now, but——"

"It is quite unnecessary that you should have told me. We have already met with some of the accomplishments of that same Zanabayah. I presume this to be another one."

"I am not Zanabayah. It makes no difference to me what you think about it," was the calm reply.

He turned away, but Nick reached out a detaining hand and stopped him.

"You will wait a moment more?" he asked politely.

"Yes. If you wish it."

"Supposing that what you have said about yourself were true, would it not have been more in keeping with the character you represent to have gone at once to Idayah and told her of your presence here, and why you are here?"

"Possibly."

"Perhaps you did not know where to find her?"

"Oh, yes. She is at your house."

"Then why have you not sought her?"

"Because it occurred to me that I might be of better service to her by remaining in the background."

"Indeed."

"I will go with you to see her now, if you desire it."

"I do desire it. I think that she will know whether you are Legayah or not. I think that she will know at once whether you are Zanabayah in disguise or not—*and I think that I will know, also, if once I get you inside my house.*"

The stranger turned so that he faced Nick squarely.

"I am afraid that you are something of a boaster," he said calmly. "You could not know. That is why I have not intruded upon you. It was because I knew that you would be suspicious. Even Idayah, my queen, the goddess, will be suspicious. She knows me well, and she likes me. She has faith in me. She also knows Zanabayah well, she dislikes him and has no faith in him; and yet the skill of Zanabayah is so great that she will not know that I am not Zanabayah, in the character of Legayah. But take me to her. I will at least try to convince her."

"And you say it is because you known of this suspicion that would be aroused, that you have refrained from making yourself known?"

"Yes."

"Then why were you pursuing us just now?"

"I was not pursuing you. I met you by accident. I attempted to avoid you, and thought I might do so best by turning my back and ignoring you. I thought that possibly you would not see me at all."

"You thought wrong, it would seem."

"Why argue, Mr. Carter? Take me to the queen."

"I will take you there, and I will penetrate your disguise, too, if you wear one."

"Take me to her. Let us see what her opinion will be. If she accepts me as I am, I will remain with you for her protection. If she does not——"

"Well?"

"I will still serve her to the best of my ability in secret."

"Come, then," said Nick.

CHAPTER V.

LEGAYAH, THE LEARNED ONE.

Nick Carter's attitude, under the conditions which surrounded him, was that of a man who is blindfolded; that is, he knew that Zanabayah and his followers were all around him, menacing him and those he loved, and yet he was unable to place any one of them.

He could only reach out in the darkness, haphazardly, in the hope that he might touch one of those seven strange men, and by clasping him, hold on to him.

And here was a man—Legayah—who might or who might not be what he claimed to be.

There was no doubt whatever in Nick's mind that Legayah was from the Sacred Valley of Peral. His white hair would prove that, for the people of that country were extraordinary in appearance only in that they were blondes in so far as the color of their skins and hair was concerned, for their eyes were as black as any Hindu's.

This man Legayah possessed that skin, that hair, and those strangely black eyes.

His voice was soft and musical, too, like the voices of those people, for that was a country of silence and of silences, and its people had strangely subdued voices.

But, on the other hand, Legayah might well be one of the Zanabayah crowd made up to represent what he was; made up in that way for the very purpose of imposing upon the detective and his friends in this manner; and Nick was inclined to the belief that such was the case.

And he argued to himself that even Idayah might be deceived.

If, for example, the man were Zanabayah or one of his men, he must know already that he could deceive the others; and yet, when Nick thought it over calmly, he could not believe that Idayah could be so readily deceived.

However, he had resolved upon the test.

When they entered the house, he asked Starbuck to precede them and to lead the way to the library; and then, as they passed inside, he bade Idayah to accompany them in the library at once.

She came.

As she entered the room she stopped abruptly, for her eyes at once perceived the presence of a stranger among them; they at once perceived that the stranger was from her own country; they at once perceived that the latter was himself the noble Legayah.

But was it?

She was puzzled as Nick had been. The same doubt would have to be resolved in her.

The thought instantly of Zanabayah and his devilish art—his subtleness in disguise.

She looked at Legayah and then at Nick; then at Legayah again, and from him to her husband; and then her eyes sought the stranger's face again and remained there.

"Are you Legayah?" she asked, keeping her eyes fixed upon his face with an unwavering gaze; and the stranger replied simply:

"Yes, goddess," for that was the manner in which men of his country addressed their queen.

"You have been told of the presence in this country of Zanabayah?"

"Yes, my queen."

"You are then aware of the doubts which assail us in the person of whosoever we see?"

"I am."

"And if you are indeed Legayah, nothing of this doubt will offend you?"

"No."

"Will you tell me, if you are Legayah, why you are here?"

"I am here in the service of my queen."

"But I am no longer your queen."

"You are forever the queen of our country, so long as you shall live. There could be no other."

"If you are Legayah indeed, you will remember that you have a means of proving it to me."

The man started. A flush crept over his face; then he replied slowly:

"I remember."

"The fact that you do remember reassures me, Legayah; for unless you have told about it yourself, the fact remains unknown to this day, save between ourselves."

"It is true, goddess. I have never told about it. Indeed, I had forgotten it."

"Can you supply me with the proof I ask?"

"If you demand it—yes."

"I do demand it. Wait."

"Yes, my queen."

"I shall take this gentleman"—she indicated Nick—"from the room with me. I shall tell him what you will do to prove to me that you are Legayah. When we return, you will furnish that proof, if you can do so. Are you prepared to do it?"

"I am."

She motioned to Nick, and he followed her from the room.

"I have told you," she said to Nick, "that you will find nobody in my country who wears a scar of any sort. I have told you that the vitic remedies remove all traces of wounds or injuries, leaving the skin as smooth and unchanged as it was before the accident. You remember?"

"Yes," said the detective.

"Once upon a time it was the hope of my father that I should become the wife of this Legayah, for Legayah loved me, and he was a favorite with my father. But I

could not wed with him. Even in my country a woman's heart is as strange as it is here in yours.

"Legayah came to the palace and plead with me in the presence of my father; but I would not relent. I insisted upon refusing him, although I liked him well and knew him to be in every way worthy of my love and respect.

"When he found that I was obdurate and would not change my mind, he crossed the throne-room—you have been in that room and remember it—and, attaching a wire to the electric bulb, he returned and stood before my father and me.

"Then—it will sound strange to you—he bared his breast before us, and he passed the electric pencil, which he had fastened to one end of the wire, to me.

"'Write, I pray you, goddess,' he said then. 'Write your name over my heart. I swear to you that I will wear the scar to the end of my days, and that none shall see it but you, or by your command.' If this man is Legayah, my name is written in a white scar upon his left breast, over his heart, where the electric pencil burned into his flesh."

"That is a good test," said the detective. "It is not written with the letters of our alphabet, of course, however."

"No. In the characters of my own country. But, see; lend me your pencil."

Nick passed it to her; also an envelope; and on the back of it she wrote six strange characters which looked like the Arabic, and which spelled her name, Idayah.

"It is my signature," she said. "If this man is indeed Legayah, the scar upon his breast will be an exact reproduction of what I have written there, only somewhat larger. Now, let us go in."

"Wait," said Nick. "Is it not possible that Zanabayah may know of this?"

"No. It is not possible. The ceremony is as sacred to people of my country as the name of the God we worship. He would not have told of it; he would not have permitted it to be seen. Come."

"And your father—he would not have told?"

"He would sooner have cut off his right hand."

"Then let us go in."

They entered the room. Legayah was standing with his back toward them, but as they entered he turned around and faced them, and Nick saw that during their absence he had bared his breast, and that now he stood holding a handkerchief over it.

"I am ready, my queen," he said simply; and he drew the handkerchief aside.

The scar was there.

Nick stepped quickly forward. He held the envelope upon which Idayah had written her name close beside the livid scar on Legayah's breast and compared the two writings.

They were the same. There could be no question of that.

But the merest glance had sufficed for Idayah.

Already she had stepped quickly forward, and now she dropped upon one knee, and before Legayah could prevent it, she had seized upon his right hand and pressed her lips to it.

Legayah snatched his hand away with an exclamation that sounded as if it might be an oath, and the red blood suffused his face in a wave of color.

But Idayah did still more. She leaped to her feet again, and before the man could dodge her she had pulled his head down close to her and kissed him upon his forehead.

"Goddess!" he exclaimed sternly.

"I am no goddess now, Legayah," she replied, laughing. "I am only a woman; a very ordinary woman, too, with all the fears and weaknesses of woman. But I am also blessed, for I still have your loyalty and your fidelity. What more could I ask?"

"I knew that Zanabayah had come here to make you suffer. I came also to protect you," replied Legayah.

"Have you seen him, my friend?"

"I have not seen him, but I do not know that he has seen me. I know that he is here, but I cannot say that he does not know that I am here."

"And you do not fear him and his strange powers?"

"I do not fear him, although I know that he is powerful; but, my queen, so am I. I have studied as well as he. Long ago I knew that I should become as learned as he or that some day he would injure you, whom I loved. Your husband will not object that I say it in his presence."

"No," said Starbuck. "God bless you, old chap! I love her, too! I guess we all love her!"

"And that's no idle dream," murmured Chick, who was in the background, an interested spectator of this scene.

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Idayah, who paid no attention to these remarks save to blush and to cast one shining glance of love upon her husband, "that you have made yourself as learned as Zanabayah?"

"I do not know as to that, for I have not sought for truths beside him; nor have I a means of measuring how much or how little he knows. But I have sought truths under the tutelage of the Wise Man of the Mountain. I have sought truths for good and not for evil purposes, and many of them I know. All my life, Idayah, since this brand was written over my heart, I have sought them, for well I knew that the day would come when you would need me."

"And now you have come to me of your own free will, Legayah."

"Listen, my queen. There is more."

"Well?"

"Before I came I called a convocation of the people, after I had first disposed of them with the Nubles."

"Yes?"

"I told them that you were in danger. I told them that Zanabayah had gone away secretly, and that he had taken all but one of his sons with him. I told them that he would wreak a terrible vengeance upon you for what you had done to him in depriving him of the throne."

"Then he did not seek to rule in my absence?"

"He sought to do so, yes; but the people would not have it so. But wait. I told them at that convention that I wished to follow you to protect you. I told them that I, too, loved our queen, and that I would save her, and I asked them if it was not best that I should go after you, find you, protect you, save you—and that after that was done, if I should not endeavor with all the power that is in me to induce you to return to them again. I almost promised them that you would return to be their queen again, if they would direct me to go after you, with their love as well as my own, in my heart for you. And they sent me.

"And, my queen, when all is done, and Zanabayah is shorn of his power, you and your husband will return with me, will you not? You need not live there always; only till it your home, and return to it and to your people when the other countries of the world tire you and you would rest? You will do that, Idayah? My queen? My goddess?"

"Yes," replied Idayah. "I will."

CHAPTER VI.

PROTECTED FROM THE WILES OF SATAN.

Legayah fell upon one knee and kissed her hand; then he rose again with all the dignity of a practised courtier.

"And now, for a time at least, will you all be directed by me?" he asked, looking at Nick, whom his intelligence had already selected as the leader among them.

"We certainly will," replied the detective.

"I have come here prepared to do battle with Zanabayah," continued the noble, "and I am well prepared."

"I am glad of that," said Nick.

"There are many things in my country, Mr. Carter, which you would class under the head of magic, but which is not magic at all, but merely applications of truths. If I should make use of any of those, you must not regard me as a magician, but only as one who has sought truths and found them."

"So I understand."

"It is my first desire to place Idayah and her son in a place of safety. I know of such a place, and how to take her there without the knowledge of Zanabayah. I will ask you, therefore, to await me on the roof of this house to-night at the hour of prayer. Pardon me—the hour that you call midnight."

"You have one of the flying-machines—one of the dumb-birds with you?" asked Nick.

"Yes, Mr. Carter. I came here in one, across the seas and countries, making no stops save those of necessity until I arrived. Will you await me on the roof at midnight?"

"We will."

"And now, do you trust me sufficiently, all of you, to permit me to take Idayah and the child away with me alone, and the rest of you to await me here until my return?"

Nick looked toward Idayah, and she nodded her head brightly.

"Yes," he said. "We trust you, Legayah."

"It is well, then. I will be here at midnight. You will await me on the roof of this house."

He strode toward the door, but a gesture from Idayah stopped him.

"Why do you not disguise yourself, Legayah?" she asked.

"I have been in hopes that Zanabayah would see me, recognize me, and attempt to harm me," he replied, pausing for a moment. "But if he has seen me, if he is aware of my presence, he knows better than to tempt fate by any such move; and yet, I thought I had kept my learning a secret from him."

"His ways are mysterious," said Idayah.

"Aye; and he will find that mine are, also."

Turning, without a word of adieu, he went out of the house into the street, and the others stood there where he had left them, looking at each other; and it was Nick himself who first broke the silence that followed upon his departure.

"It looks to me," he said, "as if Othello's occupation was gone. But I am willing to play second fiddle to a chap like that. Now, Idayah."

"Yes, Nick."

"There are going to be no more expeditions in the streets until after Legayah has returned and gone again and taken you away to a place of safety. And after that, although he said nothing about his intentions, I think it is his intention to harness us all together, barring yourself, of course, and to go on a still hunt after the fiend who calls himself Zanabayah."

"It will be a sort of round-up of magic, won't it?" asked Chick.

"Yes, or a magic round-up. I wish I had asked Legayah where it is that he intends to take Idayah. Have you any idea yourself, goddess?"

"Nick, if you call me that, I shall not answer you."

"Well, answer me this time, anyhow. I won't do it again."

"No; I haven't the least idea."

Nick had started to say something more, but had uttered no sound, when the door opened, and Joseph stood in the doorway. In his hand was the silver salver, which he used for conveying cards to his master, and upon it was a folded note.

"For you, sir," he said; and Nick took it in his hand.

The moment his eyes fell upon the contents of the note, he started; then he frowned; then he uttered a low whistle; then he smiled.

"Listen," he said, and he read aloud to them this:

"'If you will allow the person safe conduct from your house and will promise not to pursue the person in any manner, for twenty minutes after he leaves your house, one will wait upon you now with a message from Zanabayah. If you agree to this, step to your front door and wave your handkerchief thrice. It will be regarded as your promise to agree to the terms of this communication.'"

"Well, what do you think of that?" he asked, looking up after he had finished reading it.

"It is amazing," said Starbuck.

"The question is, should we allow him inside the house?" said Chick. "It is probably old Zan himself."

"That is a strange question for *you* to suggest," said Nick, looking at his assistant in surprise.

"I was thinking only of Idayah, with help for her so near at hand," replied Chick. "The likelihood is that old Zan has seen Legayah come here, and knows by now that there is something doing. He is going to take measures to prevent it, if he can. But, all the same, I say, let him in."

"Idayah, will you go to your room?" asked Nick.

"No; by your leave I will remain with you here."

"Starbuck?"

"You don't need to ask me, do you?"

"I suppose not. Nevertheless, I insist that all of you save myself only step into the adjoining room. You can remain there, with the door open, so that you can see and hear all that takes place here, and may be seen and heard as well, and yet you will be in another room. Step in there and I will go and make the signal."

They complied, and he went to the door, where he waved his handkerchief three times, as he had been directed to do; and then he stood waiting upon the steps.

But as the moments passed and nothing came of it, he waved the handkerchief again in the signal, and returned to the library.

A moment later the bell of the front door rang, and presently Joseph ushered into the room—*Legayah!*

Of all things Nick Carter had least expected this; and he exclaimed the man's name aloud, as did the others, in their surprise, in the adjoining room.

"Legayah," said Nick, then, speaking sternly, "what does this mean? You were here but a moment ago and left us with strange promises and assurances upon your lips. And now, after only the lapse of a few minutes, you return as a messenger from Zanabayah. What does it mean?"

Legayah bowed low, and there was a mocking smile upon his lips as he did so.

"You will admit, Mr. Carter," he said, "that there is no charge known to you that you could make in the courts against me?"

"Certainly."

"Very good. That is why I have dared to thrust myself so soon again into your power, so to speak. I have come now in my true character; as the friend of my people who was cruelly deserted by their queen and who wishes her to return to them, by force, if necessary; and also as the friend of Zanabayah, surnamed the Terrible, who was our trusted messenger at first, but who has needed my assistance and therefore sent for me. Will you repeat to me now the promises that I made to you a little while ago, in order that I may explain them to you more fully?"

"Your promises? Why, you scoundrel, you promised——" Nick stopped short.

Legayah had leaned forward eagerly, and it was the [illegible] that showed between his lips that made Nick halt. It had reminded him so strangely of the expression of Zanabayah that his suspicions were aroused.

"I think," he said coldly, "that I will ask you to repeat those promises and arrangements yourself—*Zanabayah!*"

The man started a little. Starbuck, in the next room, shuddered. Chick grinned. Idayah came boldly forward and confronted the man, for somehow she felt brave all at once.

"You are not Legayah," she said. "I know you; or, at least, I know Legayah. Magician that you are, Zanabayah, you cannot impersonate Legayah. If you are Legayah, as you would have us believe, where is the jewel you wear, that I gave to you many years ago—and where do you wear it? Tell me that, if you do not wish to show it. And tell me, also, what sort of jewel it is. Describe it."

The man looked into a corner, where there were curtains hanging from the ceiling.

"Wait," he said, grasping one of them. "You have promised me safe conduct. I am not Legayah. Have it your way, if you will. I am Zanabayah—perhaps. But wait. I will show you what you have to fear."

With a switch of his hand he drew the curtain around him so that it concealed him from view, and they could see from its motion that he was working there behind it, doing something.

Nick, who had good reason to fear that another trick of the magician was in preparation, drew his revolver silently and raised it as fast as you could say [illegible]

Perhaps two full minutes passed in utter silence while they waited; and then the curtain was slowly drawn aside again, and there stepped out from its concealment *—not Legayah, but a veritable reproduction of the popular idea of Satan.*

So startling was the apparition that even Nick Carter started back a little; Chick swore softly to himself; Starbuck swore loudly, so that everybody could hear him, and only Idayah made no remark or motion.

But an instant later she took a step toward this stranger who had appeared in their midst, holding something aloft in her right hand and fixing her eyes upon it.

Zanabayah—for it was he, of course—had started to speak—to say something. His lips were parted, and the evil smile was on his face when Idayah made that step toward him and held the thing aloft in her hand. But the words, whatever they may have been, remained unuttered; the smile of derision changed to one of deadly fear, and with a howl like a beast in pain, Zanabayah turned and fled from the room, through the hall and out into the street, as if he were pursued by a throng of the devils he was made up to represent.

Chick would have started in pursuit, but Nick detained him.

"A promise is a promise," he said. "Let him go." Then he turned to Idayah.

"How did you rout him so?" he asked. And he also looked at the thing she held in her hand.

It was an emerald scarib, very large, very fine, only instead of representing a beetle, it had been cut in the shape of a skull; and in the eyes of it there gleamed two rubies, and in its mouth a diamond.

"It is a charm my father gave to me," she replied. "I do not know what it is, or what its power is. But this morning I remembered it, and that I had it with me. I searched for it among my jewels, and found it. Just now, when it became known that the man was Zanabayah, I remembered what my father said to me when he placed it in my hand. Do not ask me to explain his words, because I cannot do so; but I will repeat them."

"Please," said Nick.

"He gave it to me when I was a child, half-grown; and he said to me, at the time: 'To protect you from the wiles of Satan. It will bring my presence to you.' That is all: but I remembered what he told me."

"I wonder what the fellow intended to accomplish by that masquerade, anyway?" said Chick.

"Probably he thought to frighten us," replied Nick. "At all events, he is gone for the present—and he was not Legayah, returned. Thank Heaven for that!"

CHAPTER VII.

NICK CARTER'S MIDNIGHT CALLER.

At ten minutes before twelve o'clock that night the several who were most interested in the coming of Legayah came from Nick Carter's study and started for the roof to meet the man from the Sacred Valley who was to take the young mother away with her child upon the flying-machine which was called a dumb-bird.

The night was a warm one, for it will be remembered that it was in the middle of June; but, nevertheless, Idayah was wrapped in furs, for she had had much experience in the air, and she knew that even in the warmest seasons the temperature was always low in lofty altitudes.

The one mystery about what was the follow—and be it said, the one misgiving which the detective felt—was that not one of them, no even Idayah herself, had any idea of the place to which Legayah intended to conduct her.

But during the evening when Nick had suggested this one unpleasant feature of the plan, she had replied to him that she had perfect confidence in the man, and that it was best for all concerned that she should place herself entirely in his hands.

"He will care for me," she told the detective. "He has laid his plans with care, and his wisdom is great. He will have found a way in which I and mine will be perfectly safe, otherwise he would not have ventured to say so. Let me go. Ask no questions.

"And when I am gone," she continued, after a short pause, "you will be unhampered in your contention against the evils that Zanabayah exerts. You will not have me to look after and protect. You will know that I am safe, and, knowing that, you will be the more so; you and the others."

And so it had been arranged, without further objection.

Nick Carter was standing there on the roof in the moonlight with his watch in his hand, and it was indicating exactly twelve when a soft, whirring sound, exactly like that which is made by an electric fan in a large room, smote upon their ears. A moment later a shadow passed between them and the moon, and then, with a gentle, spiral-shaped descent, the great, birdlike apparatus which in the Sacred Valley is called a dumb-bird, floated into view and alighted on the roof beside them.

As it dropped down upon its perch on the roof, the driver—Legayah—moved the lever which folded the huge wings in place, and stepped out before them.

The reader must not suppose that these wings were used as are the wings of a bird; they were only for supporting the dumb-bird on the air, for soaring; and their color was of a neutral tint which rendered the machine almost invisible at a short distance away.

Legayah wore one of the aerial suits made purposely for the apparatus, which made him appear like a fat boy of some museum; but, nevertheless, he bowed before

his queen with stately courtesy, and took her hand and kissed it.

"We are ready, Idayah," he said.

"Wait," replied Idayah. "Before I step aboard the dumb-bird I must tell you about the visit of Zanabayah immediately after your departure to-day."

"I know about it," he replied calmly. "It was reported to me almost at once. And I was told, also, that not long after he entered the house, he left it again in great haste, as if he were pursued; that he had changed himself into a representation of Satan, and that he was running away in great teror. Tell me, Idayah, have you in your possession an emerald that is shaped like a skull which your father might have given to you?"

"Yes," she told him, surprised that he should know about it.

"The Wise Man of the Mountain told me that your father once possessed an emerald skull, but that since his death it had disappeared. It was not known what had become of it, but it was supposed to be in your possession. You were fortunate in having it with you."

"Why? Why should that green jewel—it is nothing but a stone, when all is said—why should such a thing have power over the machinations and magic of a man like Zanabayah?"

Legayah smiled, and he turned to the others when he replied, so that all might hear and understand.

"Superstition is, perhaps, the greatest mental power that exists," he said. "There is no man and no person in the world who is not in one form or another the victim of superstition. There are those who will tell you that they are not superstitious about anything at all, but they lie when they say it. Superstition does exist; it does exist in every brain, in every intelligence. I am not free from it. You, Nick Carter, are not free from it, although I should say that you possess less of it than most men.

"But the point is that we all have it—Zanabayah among others.

"He is one who deals in superstition—who works upon the superstition of others; and yet he has one of his own which, because it is possibly his only one, controls him utterly whenever he thinks about it, or as he did to-day, comes in contact with it—and his superstition is dread of that emerald skull.

"Mark you, it has no power whatever. Your own intelligence will assure you of that; but many years ago when Zanabayah was studying necromancy among the mountains, an old seer told him and warned him to beware of the touch of an emerald skull; and that same seer, being crafty and also a friend of Idayah's father, told him about the warning—for a price.

"Do you understand what followed? It was that [illegible] skull, which is now in Idayah's possession.

"Zanabayah was told by that seer long ago that a touch from that emerald skull would instantly deprive him of all his power; and that was why he fled from you, Idayah. He feared that you would touch him with it.

"That same seer has since become the Wise Man of the Mountain who taught me; and he told me the story about it.

"There, you are told. It was nothing, after all; nothing but a harmless superstition, but it will serve to prove to you all that even the strongest of us may succumb to the weakest if we permit ourselves to lose our self-control, our self-poise, our power of will.

"Superstition is temptation in another form; it is always fear. Now, let us go."

He reached out, and, touching Idayah's arm with the tips of his fingers, he guided her upon the machine to the seat she was to occupy, where she was protected by a transparent shield; then he buckled the straps around her to hold her securely in her place; then he made his own preparations for comfort and safety, and with his hand upon the lever which was to start the machinery in motion which would carry them away, he said to Nick Carter:

"You will wait for me here until I return, Mr. Carter?"

"What! Here on the roof? Will you return as soon as that?"

"No; wait for me at your home; that is what I intended to say."

"How long a time?"

"That I cannot say definitely. Possibly two days; possibly three; I cannot say."

"I will wait," replied the detective. "Take good care of Idayah and the child"—for the sleeping Tonoyah grandson of a king of the same name, was [illegible] wrapped in blankets and held tightly in its [illegible] arms.

* * * * * * *

The three had returned silently to Nick Carter's [illegible] they dropped into chairs in silence; they lighted [illegible] in silence; and they smoked in silence for a cons[illegible] time.

It was Starbuck who spoke first.

"What are we going to do now, Nick?" he [illegible] "Just wait here like a lot of chumps until Legayah [illegible] turns?"

Nick did not at once reply, and Starbuck [illegible]

"I am not so easy about all this business as [illegible] to be. Idayah seemed to have perfect confidence [illegible] gayah, and so I said nothing. It was certain [illegible] was not safe here, not even for a moment, and [illegible] of us on guard over her; but all the same I [illegible] that I had insisted upon going with her."

"I think," said Nick slowly, "that Legayah is al[illegible] The only thing that I doubt about him is the tim[illegible]

he will be gone—and the probable destination of his airship."

"Why? Do you think——"

"I am more than half of the opinion that when Idayah left the roof of the house, she was started straight for the palace of the kings in the Sacred Valley."

"But, great Scott, man! It would be three months—four months—before Legayah could return if he took her there."

Nick nodded.

"I may be wrong," he said. "Time alone will tell us that. In the meantime——"

"Yes; in the meantime—what?"

"I supose we must wait."

"But not for months—not that. Great heaven! I would go crazy in less than that time. I wish to heaven that I had not permitted Idayah to go with the fellow."

"We will wait," said the detective slowly, "three days. If Legayah is not back here by that time I will start Chick for Washington at once, there to secure the use for a time of the great flying machine which we gave to the government; and we shall start with it at once, with Tan-Ichi for company, for the Sacred Valley. But we will wait three days."

"Three days from now?"

"Three days from the moment of the departure of Legayah from the roof. And now, if I am in command of this party, my order is, go to bed."

"You can order all right enough; it is quite another thing to obey. Gee whiz! Do you suppose that I could sleep now? If it is all the same to you, you and Chick can go to bed, but I shall go down stairs to the library, select a book and a pipe and read. Good night."

He rose and left the room, and they heard him descending the stairs toward the library.

"What about you, Chick?" asked the detective smiling.

"I will confess that I feel very little like sleeping. However, I think I will go to bed."

"And I," said the detective.

But he did not.

When Chick left him alone in the study, he remained seated where he was, and after a little he lighted a fresh cigar and leaned back in his chair with half-closed eyes, thinking over the events of the strange case that now interested him.

It had been days of fatigue before that one, and although he would possibly not have admitted the fact, the detective was very tired; sitting there and smoking, a drowsiness stole over him so that presently he forgot to puff upon his cigar and the fire died out and disappeared; his eyes only half open before, closed entirely, and the detective slept in his chair in the study.

Chick himself, too, for alert as he was as a rule, and easily awakened, he was not startled when the unlocked door of his study swung slowly open, and a face appeared in the aperture peering in at him as he slept.

It was the face of Zanabayah, too; the face of that demon as we know it; the rather lean, but handsome face, with its flashing eyes, and that cruel smile showing the gleaming teeth between the unnatural red lips.

There had not been a sound which would have disturbed a mouse, had one been playing upon the floor between Nick Carter and the door which was now slowly swinging open; for the people who hailed from the Sacred Valley were masters of the art of silence. In their country, where vibric force was the all-powerful agent, silence was the law, lest that terrible force should be disturbed.

A master of silence was Zanabayah; and he continued to push that door further ajar while Nick Carter continued to sleep, unmindful of the near approach of his most deadly enemy.

And then the necromancer stepped inside the room.

He moved as a cat moves when it approaches its prey; with continuous motion, and yet so slowly that there is almost no motion perceptible; and certainly no sound.

He closed the door behind him, as softly as he had opened it; and then he stepped forward nearer to the detective, and at last paused directly behind him, within easy reach of him; and he stood there with that same cruel smile upon his countenance, with his basilisk eyes fixed upon Nick Carter, sleeping quietly in the chair.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

Had Zanabayah wished to murder the detective, he could easily have accomplished it then.

But it was evident that such was not his intention, for having remained for a moment in his menacing attitude behind the chair of the sleeping detective, he deliberately reached out his right hand, which the light on the table shone upon, revealing the fact that he carried in the palm of it a small instrument which was not unlike an ordinary hypodermic needle.

And this, without hesitation, he plunged deeply into the arm of the sleeping detective.

One would suppose that the sharp prick of a needle in the flesh of a sleeping man, would rouse him instantly; well, this did that much.

It roused him, for he started sharply when the needle touched him; but instantly his muscles relaxed and he sank back again against the upholstery, as motionless as if he were a graven image, but with his eyes wide open; and intelligently open at that.

And in the meantime, Zanabayah had stepped around in front of him, so that now Nick's open eyes could see the man and recognize him.

And oh, how vainly did Nick Carter try, at that moment, to rouse himself to action! How he strained his muscles, which never before had refused to respond to his call.

But, alas, now, his arms were as if they were made of lead: as if there were no longer nerves in his system to respond to the commands of his brain.

To save his life, he could not move anything but his eyes; and those he kept fixed upon the face of the intruder with an expression that was terrible to see, for he realized his own helplessness and that he was utterly at the mercy of this embodied fiend.

And Zanabayah stood there in front of him, smiling down upon him with his flashing eyes, his gleaming teeth, and his blood-red lips, looking for all the world as if he were some human vampire.

"You see," said Zanabayah softly, "I have at last called upon you, Nick Carter. I have taken a time when I knew that you would least expect me. I have come to make terms with you."

The detective tried to reply, but he could not utter a sound. He could move nothing but his eyes, although his brain seemed to be as clear as it ever had been; and he wondered what terrible drug had been shot into his veins that should so paralyze every energy he had save intelligence.

But Zanabayah saw by the expression in Nick's eyes that he was endeavoring to reply to him, and he took a vial from his pocket and removed the cork. Then, stepping forward, he moistened a corner of his handkerchief with the fluid, and applied it to Nick's jaws.

The detective could feel the muscles relax in response to the treatment; and when Zanabayah commanded him to open his mouth, he did so.

A drop more of the liquid on his tongue restored the detective's powers of speech miraculously; and now he found that he could move his jaws and the muscles of his neck, and that he could also talk; but more than that he could not do. He was still as helpless and as powerless to move as he had been since the needle was jabbed into his flesh.

"Now," said Zanabayah, "we can be quite cozy. We can discuss our affairs pleasantly; no? May I venture to help myself to one of your cigars? It is a habit I have acquired—to smoke—since I have been in this country of yours, Mr. Carter. Are you quite comfortable, sir? But of course you are since you have no particular sensation of your body now. I suppose you are exceedingly glad to see me; no?"

"I would be if you had not somehow deprived me of the power of using my muscles," was Nick's reply. "How do you know that I will not call out for help?"

"I know it because you could not do so. Try, if you like. You will find that you cannot raise your voice above what it is now. You could not make yourself heard beyond that door, which, by the way, I think I had better fasten while we are here together. There is no likelihood that we will be interrupted, but it is as well to be prepared."

"Perhaps you will tell me why you are here," said Nick, when the door was locked and Zanabayah had returned to his chair; the same one where Starbuck had been seated before he left the room to go to the library.

"Oh, yes. I will tell you. I have come to make terms with you, Nick Carter."

"Well?" said Nick. "What sort of terms? You seem to have me at your mercy, just now. I am forced to listen to you, whether I wish to do so or not. What terms have you to propose to me? I confess that I do not even try to understand you."

"You will admit that I have you in my power, will you not?" asked Zanabayah.

"For the moment—yes," was the reply.

"And that I could put you out of life—which is another method of saying that I could kill you—if I choose to do so, very easily?"

"Yes."

"And also that the other people in this house are equally at my mercy?"

"For the sake of the argument I will admit it. What then?"

"Do not you wonder that I have not done so already?"

"I have not thought about it at all."

Zanabayah took another needle from one of his pockets and held it out in the palm of his hand so that the detective could see it.

"You observe what I hold in my hand?" he asked.

"Yes. Plainly."

"One touch of the point of that needle would put you forever out of life—would kill you, as you would express it. Down stairs, in the library, Starbuck sleeps now, even as you slept, only the more soundly since I have already visited him. Up-stairs in his room, your assistant Chick is dreaming dreams which I have induced; in another room the young man who is called Patsy, is in the same condition. Below, again, at a room at the end of your front hall, the man Joseph is now insensible to the ills and trials of the world. In the servants' quarters—well, I have not visited them for the reason that I know that none of the servants are likely to visit this part of the house during the night. I tell you all this in order that you may realize fully how completely at my mercy you are at this moment. There is no one here to come to your assistance even if it were possible for you to cry out."

"Then why did you take the trouble to lock the door?" asked the detective.

"As a mere matter of precaution, that is all. Now, let us refer again to the needle that I hold in my hand."

"Well?"

"One touch of its point would kill you, Nick Carter."

"You said that before."

"And I have come here to apply that death-dealing touch unless I can convince you of the wisdom of agreeing to the terms I shall make."

"But why, under the circumstances, should you find it necessary to make terms? If I am so completely at your mercy as you say—and I do not doubt that I am—why should Zanabayah require terms of me? Why don't you kill me first and make your terms afterward?"

"You are a brave man, Nick Carter!"

"That does not reply to my question."

"It is possible, is it not, that you can serve my purposes better alive, than if you were dead?"

"I suppose so. Else you would have done the murderous work at once."

"In that you are correct. Now, if you will reply to my questions truthfully, and will afterward agree to the conditions I shall make—and I assure you they will not be difficult—I will spare your life and the lives of the other persons at this moment in your house."

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall put you to death—and the others, also."

The man made the statement as if he were talking of the most ordinary circumstance; but Nick Carter knew that he was in deadly earnest.

"Do you consent?" asked Zanabayah.

"I don't know—until I have heard the questions I am to answer, and am told the condition to which I must agree."

"Where is Idayah, now?"

"I do not know—save that she is somewhere in the air in the company of Legayah."

"I suspected that. But where have they gone?"

"I do not know. Legayah gave me no inkling of his intentions, save to say that he would take her to a place where she would be safe from you. I believed him—and he departed."

"He did not tell you where it was that he would take her?"

"For doubtless he foresaw some such circumstance as this one and desired it were that I should not know, so I can say to you with perfect truth, I do not know."

"His destination could not have been the Sacred Valley?"

"I have told you that I do not know. I should suppose with all the strange powers that you possess, that of divination would be one of them. I should suppose that you would have only to ask your questions of the evil powers by which you are surrounded to receive an answer at once from the surrounding darkness of ignorance."

"You are pleased to be sarcastic, Mr. Carter; but it does not affect me. You are as well aware as I am that there is nothing supernatural about the powers I use. I am as much a man and a human man as you are; with something more of knowledge of the sciences and of the latent forces of nature, perhaps; but I am only a man, with all a man's passions, his loves, his hatreds, and his ambitions."

"You are at least developing a little sense," said Nick. "Go on."

"Is Legayah to return here after he has placed Idayah in what he supposes is a place of safety?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When he has disposed of her according to his plans."

"But when do you expect him to return here?"

"I do not know."

"Is that the truth?"

"Yes."

"Did he not place some limit on the time he would be absent?"

"Three days."

"And then? What was to be done here, after his return?"

Nick thought deeply a moment before he replied to that question. His idea was that it would be best for him to answer all the questions which Zanabayah chose to ask. He did not see how it could harm his own cause to do so—and it gained time. Besides, *he began to realize now that Legayah had foreseen this moment or something very like it, and had made his plans accordingly.*

"We were to attack you," he said, presently, watching Zanabayah as he said it.

But the latter only smiled one of his wolfish smiles, and was also silent for a moment.

"I wonder where Legayah found his courage?" he asked after a moment, more as if he were asking himself the question, than if he were addressing the detective; but Nick answered promptly:

"From the Wise Man of the Mountain."

Zanabayah started. The smile left his lips and he showed his teeth in a good representation of a snarl; then he said, with heat:

"You lie."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"How do you know that what you tell me is true?" demanded the fiend.

"I know only what Legayah told me," replied Nick. "He referred often to the Wise Man of the Mountain."

With a quick effort Zanabayah recovered from the shock that the intelligence had visited upon him, and after a moment, he said:

"Nick Carter, what you tell me has pronounced your doom. Nothing can save you now—for you must die."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER WITNESSES AN ASTOUNDING THING.

Zanabayah meant it, too. That was evident from the expression on his face as he leaned forward when he made the threat, and gazed deeply into the detective's eyes.

"You must die," he repeated, "unless——"

"Oh, there is a way out, then?" asked the detective. "What is it?"

But Zanabayah made no answer. He was thinking deeply, and slowly Nick saw a smile dawn upon his face.

"I think, Nick Carter, that instead of killing you just now, I will make you my tool. I have thought of a way to do it—a way that will interest you, since it is borrowing for a time some of your own methods. I am going to leave you for a moment, and if you wish to call out for help, I have no objections, since it will be impossible for you to make a sound louder than you have already spoken."

Without another word he turned and left the room, leaving the door open behind him as if it were true that he had no fear of interruption.

Nick could hear him pass along the hallway to the next flight of stairs, and ascend them; and then the detective did make an effort to shout aloud; but he found that the fiend had spoken the truth when he said that such an effort would be useless.

And three minutes later, Zanabayah returned; and he carried in his hands two belts of an inlated substance like thin rubber, which looked as if they might have served for life-belts at sea.

One of these he adjusted beneath the arms of the detective; the other he fastened around his waist; and then, without an apparent effort at all, he bent forward and raised the detective from the chair in which he was seated—lifted him as easily as he would have done the child that had been taken away with Legayah, and Nick knew that the belts that had been fastened to him were those gas-belts which overcame the attraction of gravitation.

At all events, Zanabayah carried him easily out of the room, closing the door and fastening it ouside, removing the key and taking it with him.

And then he carried the detective up the stairs to the top of the house, and out upon the roof, closing doors carefully after him; and at last crossing the roof where rested the same sort of flying-machine, or air-ship, as Legayah had used when he took Idayah away.

He placed the detective upon this and strapped him fast to it; then he adjusted one of the aerial suits to his own person; then he stepped aboard and strapped himself fast to the seat he was to occupy, and then, with a smile which Nick could see in the starlight, he said:

"I am giving you a trip through the air, Mr. Carter. I hope you will enjoy it as you should do."

He did not wait for a reply if Nick had chosen to make one, but at once set the machinery in motion, so that they left the roof instantly and mounted into the air, straight upward for several hundred feet.

Then more buttons were pressed, other machinery was set in motion, and the strange vehicle of the air darted away over the housetops at a rate of speed which Nick could not even guess at.

And all this time Nick Carter could not move a muscle. The invisible chains which enthralled him, and which had been induced by that mysterious drug, had lost none of the power to hold him, and he could only remain a passive spectator of what was happening around him.

But his brain was active.

He kept as clear an account of the time and the direction in which they traveled as was possible under the circumstances.

He was chilled to the bone by the cool air at that height and the rapid flight through it; but he said no word, nor did Zanabayah, until, at last, with a soaring swoop, the dumb-bird circled and descended, and at last alighted upon the roof of a building that was completely surrounded by a forest; and Nick had no idea at all where they were.

And still Zanabayah remained silent; but he made the machine fast to the roof and undid the straps which held the detective. Then he lifted him as easily as he had done before and bore him across the roof, through a doorway that was open, and so inside the house upon which they had alighted.

They descended a flight of stairs to another floor, and thence along a hallway to a door which opened to admit them as they advanced, and then into a large square room.

And how there was a surprise awaiting the detective! for when Zanabayah got him, helpless as he was, down upon a chair that he pulled forward for the purpose, the detective saw that there were three other men in that room, and that each looked so exactly alike that if one changed places with another before him, he could not tell which was which; and all three were exact counterparts of Zanabayah himself.

"I am in the presence of three of the sons of Zanabayah," was his thought, although he uttered no word. "One is in the Tombs; one is at police-headquarters, and the other, according to Legayah, is still at home in the Sacred Valley. These, then, are the remaining three."

There was actually no difference in the appearance of these four men; one did not look younger or older than another.

Nick had often wished that he might sometime come face to face with the Zanabayah crowd, as he called it, and now he had his wish fulfilled, although not in exactly the manner he had prayed for it.

But now Zanabayah—or was it Zanabayah himself? Nick could not have told—stood before him with that same smile of evil on his handsome face.

"I am about to give you a lesson in one of your own favorite arts," he said coldly. "If you will watch me, you will perhaps learn something."

Nick made no reply, for as yet he had no idea what the man intended to do.

But he was not long left in doubt, for, with signs which the man made to his sons, they were presently employed in bringing different articles to their father.

Nick Carter had often made himself up to represent another person. We who have followed him through so many of his adventures, have often been witnesses to such a proceeding; but this was the first time in Nick Carter's experience when he had been compelled to sit helplessly in a chair and watch another do the same thing with himself as the subject of it.

But he understood instantly that such was the intention of Zanabayah.

He realized at once that the transformation intended to go forth again that night made up to look Carter, to return, doubtless, to Nick Carter's house and present himself to those who were waiting there.

And now Nick began to realize, also, the skilful ingenuity of the man.

He went about his work with a deliberation which showed the confidence he felt in himself, and with a certainty of entire success in his bearing which made the detective again attempt to bring motion and life into his paralyzed muscles.

But he could not do so. He could only sit there and look on at the proceedings impotently.

The four men were strangely silent. They were silent people, Nick remembered; and it was Nick who spoke first.

"You may be an expert at your craft," he said, "but you won't fool Chick."

"I could fool the devil himself," was the reply.

"You are taller than I; much taller."

"I know how to reduce my height. By a contraction of the muscles, which I have practiced many times, and also a physical sinking at the joints, I can reduce my height easily, by—well, enough to fool even Chick, as you call him."

It is not necessary that the operation of making the change should be described in detail; suffice it to say that Nick's clothes were presently stripped from him; and when Zanabayah had donned them and added the finishing-touches to his make-up, he stood before Nick and laughed in his face.

For he was as perfect a counterpart of the detective as can be imagined.

Nick, himself, could detect nothing about the make-up that he could criticise; and even the voice, when Zanabayah spoke, was perfectly assumed; and the height, which Nick had believed impossible to change sufficiently, was reduced until, as he stood there, Nick groaned in spirit, believing that even Chick would be deceived.

"And now," said Zanabayah, "I am Nick Carter, and you are nothing. Have you thought of how many purposes this masquerade will serve me?"

"No," replied the detective.

Zanabayah ticked them off on his finger-tips as he enumerated them.

"One," he said, "I will be at your house to meet Legayah when he returns. Two, I have two sons now in prison whom my influence in this disguise will serve to liberate, for they will easily be released to you. Three, I will find out from Legayah when he returns, where he has taken Idayah. Four, I will go there, wherever it may be, after her. Five, I will easily learn the confidence of Starbuck, and, having it, I will lead him to his death,

which shall result from apparently natural causes, so that Idayah may not be prejudiced. Six, after that is done, I shall still remain Nick Carter, to all the world. I will win the confidence of Idayah and Siv, who is mere slave lady in love with your sons, and would be entirely so if it were not that she loved Starbuck first, will soon consent to put me in his place—for in my country we do not mourn our dead; we are glad with them, that they are gone to the glory that awaits them. Now, what do you think of it all?"

Nick did not reply.

What could he have said?

There was nothing to say. He saw plainly that this fiend in human shape had builded perfectly. He felt that there would be little if any difficulty in deceiving Starbuck, and even Legayah, when he should return; he had thought at first that Chick could not be deceived; but now he had to admit to himself that even Chick would be likely to fall a victim to the master-deception.

And he realized the deadly certainty of the plan of Zanabayah.

To have put Starbuck out of the way by violence would have been to plunge her in grief; but to kill him by apparently natural causes, would be to make her a widow; and after that—Nick knew that Zanabayah could win her if he but played his part perfectly to the end.

He was interrupted in his thoughts by the fiend again.

"That is not all," he was saying. "I have left one thing unsaid till the last. I shall keep you here, alive, with my sons to watch over you, until I am assured that I shall not need you again; and then—need I say what then?"

Again Nick made no reply; and Zanabayah laughed, evidently well pleased by the success of his plans thus far.

"You will find my sons not very good company," he said. "Only one of these who are here, can speak your language, and that one rather imperfectly; and they are silent men at the best. But they will look out for your wants—and for your safety. I mean your safety as far as I am concerned.

"You must not suppose that an opportunity will be given you to move about. Your muscles will remain fastened as they are now, until I have no further need of you; and then you will be relieved of your misery by being put to death. I say, truly, because there is no misery in the world like the suffering of the mental qualities; and you suffer now because you are a helpless lump of clay before me. Have you anything to say before I go?"

"Yes. This: *you will fail.*"

"I cannot fail."

"You will fail."

"You—are a fool!"

"Perhaps; but you will fail. The emerald skull will be your undoing."

For just one instant Zanabayah hesitated as if he were about to make some reply. A spasm as if of pain contorted his face; and then it passed, leaving his smile, which now was Nick Carter's smile; even that.

An then, turning about, he disappeared through the door, closing it behind him.

CHAPTER X.

CHICK SUSPECTS.

And now, for the sake of the chronology of this story, we must perforce leave Nick Carter in that room where Zanabayah left him in charge of the three sons; and, leaving him there, we must still bear in mind that he is there, and that the man who appears to be Nick Carter, is not he at all, but Zanabayah, the Terrible.

The "Seven-headed Monster," as Chick had so aptly called him, had now the upper hand of affairs; there could be no denying that.

Of course we are not permitted to follow him on his return flight to the house, for he has never revealed his thoughts of what he did that night. We can only see the remainder of what happened through the eyes of others who were concerned in these events.

When Starbuck opened his eyes, stretched himself, and yawned, he was surprised to discover that he was still seated in the library and that daylight was streaming in through the windows.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I must have fallen asleep here all right. And I must have slept like a log at that. Somebody has been in the room, too, and turned off the light. I suppose it was Nick."

He yawned again, and looked at his watch.

Here he uttered another exclamation of surprise, for it was almost nine o'clock.

"I did not suppose they ever slept so late on this job Nick Carter's house," he muttered. "But the fact is we

were all rather done up. Heigho! I'll go on a still-hunt and find out if I am the only one who is awake."

He went into the dining-room, and there he found Chick seated near a window, reading the morning paper as if nothing had happened.

"Hello, Chick," he said. "Did you know that I slept in the library last night?"

"Yes. I found you there a little bit ago. I turned off the light and left you. Patsy and I were the only ones who went to bed. I think—except, of course, Joseph. Nick remained at work in his study till after daylight, he says, and then napped in his chair."

"Have you all had breakfast?"

"No. It will be ready in a few moments."

"All right. I'll be down."

Starbuck hurried up the stairs then, and three minutes later he was splashing in the tub, but it wasn't long after that when he tapped gently at the door of the detective's study, and was bidden to enter.

"Good morning, Nick," he said, rather sheepishly. "I suppose you know the report about me, don't you?"

"Eh?" was the reply. "What report?"

"That I slept in the library—deuced funny thing for me to do, you know; can't understand it in the least. And Chick says that you have only napped in your chair, in here. Is that a fact, old chap?"

The man whom Starbuck supposed was none other than Nick Carter, leaned back in his chair where he was seated at the desk, and replied:

"It seems that all of us were a little bit reckless about our sleeping last night. Are you ready for breakfast?"

"You bet! And with an appetite like a horse."

"Good! We will go down."

They descended the stairs together; they entered the breakfast-room together. Patsy was there with Chick now, and after a moment they assembled around the table and the breakfast was brought in to them, while Joseph hovered around in the background ready to serve them all; for, although Joseph bore the official title of valet, he was everything in that household.

Now and then, while they talked together during the meal, Chick glanced up sharply at his supposed chief; but each time he resumed his eating again, reassured; but at last, when something was said that for some reason particularly jarred upon him, he said abruptly:

"What is the matter with you this morning, Nick? Aren't you well?"

"Has it occurred to you," was the quiet reply, in Nick Carter's voice, "that we all slept rather soundly last night? And also unusually late this morning?"

"Yes; it has."

"Has it occurred to you to ask yourself why?"

"Yes; it has."

"I have discovered that many things in my room, among my papers, and other things as well, have been disturbed during the night. Can you account for that, Chick?"

Chick was startled.

"Do you mean to imply," he said, "that Zanabayah paid us a visit during the night?"

"I haven't a doubt of it," was the instant reply. "I think he did more than that. I am of the opinion that he visited each of us, during the time he was here—even Joseph; and you just now asked me if I felt well. To tell you the truth, I feel very strangely. I am not myself, somehow, Chick."

"That accounts for it," said Chick.

"Yes; that accounts for it, whatever it is that you mean. I suppose that Zanabayah must have drugged us, and that the effect of it has not worn off entirely."

"I feel as fit as a fiddle," said Starbuck.

"I do not feel badly," said Patsy.

"Nor I," said Chick. "You seem to be the only one, Nick, who experienced any ill effects from the visitation—if visitation there was."

"Possibly," was the reply, "he gave me a larger dose than he did you. At all events I am not myself."

"What I cannot understand," said Chick musingly, "is why he did not lay us all out for good if he succeeded in getting inside the house and visiting every one of us. He could easily have killed us all and have left no trace of it behind him."

"Possibly he had other plans. Possibly it was a surprise to him to come here and find Idayah gone. It is likely that he did not know of the plans of Legayah. It is likely that he did nothing more than drug us, because, finding her gone, he hopes through us to be led to her again:"

"There certainly is something wrong about you, Nick," said Chick. "I think you had better go and give yourself another nap."

"No," was the reply. "I am going out. The air will be better than sleep."

And then, without more words, he left the house.

But Chick followed him to the door and called after him:

"Don't you think you had better take me with you, Nick?"

"No; I want you to remain here. All of you. Such are my wishes for the present. Remember that we do not know at what time Legayah will reappear; and remember, also, that Starbuck is not safe if he is left alone. Zanabayah may reappear at any moment."

Chick went inside the house shaking his head dubiously.

"What is the matter?" Starbuck asked him; but he did not reply. After a little he said:

"Come up to Nick's study, Starbuck. Let's sit there until he returns. There are no cigars down here, anyhow, and there are plenty there." And in the study, after they had lighted their cigars and seated themselves to enjoy them, he added: "Did you notice anything strange about Nick this morning?"

"No; why?"

"I thought that he acted queerly."

"What about?"

"That is what puzzles me. About nothing in particular; about everything in general. If I did not *know* better I should have thought that it was not Nick at all."

"Now, what the devil do you mean by that, Chick?"

Chick was silent for a moment; then he said slowly:

"I feel that it is rather hard to explain to what I do mean, but I will try."

"Well?"

"Nick and I have been inseparable companions for a good many years, now. Originally, he found me out in the West—in the state of Nevada, where I was an unknown boy, wandering about there and living as best I could. I was only a little lad then, and I was fortunate enough to be of assistance to him in one of his great cases. I remember that it was called 'One Against Twenty-One.' But that has nothing to do with the case."

"What are you getting at, anyhow?"

"You will know presently. Nick took a liking to me. When the case was finished, he offered to bring me back East with him, to adopt me into his family, to treat me as a son, to give me an education, to train me in his own profession—and all that."

"Well?"

"He did it. I was given the name of Chickering Carter. I was baptised by that name. I became one of the family. His wife, Ethel, was alive then. She was the best woman that ever lived in all the world, bar none.

"Wait, now, Starbuck, I know what I am talking about, and you will know, too, in a few moments. What I want to say is, that although people suppose differently, there is really no blood relationship between Nick Carter and myself. We look something alike, it is true, but we are not related.

"But, Starbuck, there has always been something between us that is nearer than the ties of blood could ever be of themselves."

Starbuck nodded violently.

"I can understand that," he said.

"No, you cannot; that is, not what I mean. I mean that there has always existed a strange, and, you might say, an incomprehensible, sympathy between Nick and me. If he is in trouble of any kind, I seem to know it, no matter what the distance between us happens to be. It is like the Corsican brothers. You know about that?"

"Yes."

"If I am in California and Nick is here, and something happens to him which disturbs him, I always seem to sense the fact at once; as if there were some sort of telepathy between us that has nothing to do with our wills, which is entirely involuntary, and yet which is as real as that hand which I hold out now for you to see."

Starbuck nodded again.

"And this morning," continued Chick in a lower tone, and leaning forward, as if to give emphasis to his words, "this morning when I awakened, there was a sense of heaviness about me which told me that Nick was in trouble. I rose at once and hurried to his room. He was not there and the bed had not been slept in. I was alarmed then and hastened to his study, and there I found him apparently sleeping in his chair, although he opened his eyes and stared at me the instant I entered.

"Even then there was something in the look he gave me which was not natural. In all the years I have known Nick, I have never seen that expression in *his* eyes. It was as if he were startled.

"It disappeared instantly, of course, and he spoke quite naturally to me.

"Well, you know the rest, so far as anything has occurred between us; but all the morning, at the breakfast-table, and before that, and ever since he has gone

out, that sense of oppression is upon me heavier than ever, and if I *were* in California, as I suggested a moment ago, I would *know* that wherever Nick might be, he was in mental trouble of some sort.

"Hush! Wait! Do not interrupt. He tells us now that there is no doubt in his mind that Zanabayah was in this house last night. Neither is there any doubt in my mind, for the matter of that; *but Nick Carter would not have told me of it in the way he did this morning if he were entirely himself.*"

"But he said that he did not feel like himself."

"Starbuck, you have heard it said that Zanabayah can disguise himself so perfectly that he can fool anybody on earth. Do you suppose that it would be a possible thing for him to do, *to put himself into Nick Carter's place?*"

CHAPTER XI.

HOW CHICK DETECTS THE PLOT.

For a minute Starbuck remained staring, open-mouthed, at Chick. Then he laughed.

And he laughed immoderately; heartily; loudly; till the tears came into his eyes and he was forced to desist for lack of strength to continue. And all the while that he was laughing, Chick sat silently regarding him with stern countenance, with gloomy eyes, with set jaw, and with countenance so stern that Starbuck at last realized that he had done wrong to express his amusement as he had done.

"You are not in earnest, are you, Chick?" he asked then rather contritely.

"I am, in deadly earnest."

"I only wish that Nick Carter could hear you," was all the reply that Starbuck could think of at the moment.

"Stop and think about it for a moment, Starbuck. Think first how utterly fatal it would be to us all, and to our sweet wife in particular, *if this thing I have suggested were true.*"

Starbuck began to look solemn again.

"Think how fatal such a thing would be to us all. Think of it for a moment. Think what may have become of Nick himself, if it is true. Think, think, think!"

"What the devil good does it do to think?" growled the bothered man.

"Now is the time when we must think, if ever, while he is away from us. Think of all that has been said, of all that we have been warned against in regard to this Zanabayah fiend of a man, who has already proved to us much of the devilish ingenuity of which he is capable. Think of what your own wife has said about it. Think of what Zanabayah did only yesterday when he returned to this house a few moments after the departure of Legayah, having in that time made up so perfectly to represent Legayah that even Nick was deceived for a moment."

"I know. I know."

"This man whom we believe to be Nick Carter—whom we have every reason to believe is Nick and no other, tells us—in a manner that is not Nick's—that Zanabayah was here in this house during the night, and that he drugged us all. What did he come here for, if he came at all?"

"Look here, Chick, you have got to answer your own questions if you want them answered at all. You have got me all mixed up, so that I don't know whether I am a man or a monkey."

"If he came here at all, he came here to accomplish something—some definite purpose, and, failing in that, do you suppose he would have gone away satisfied and left us to wake up unharmed this morning? Don't you suppose that he would have worked some of his chicanery upon one of us or all of us? It goes without saying that he would have done that."

"Well, well, well? What then?"

"What then? How do I know what then? If he is as smart as they say he is; if he can transform himself into the semblance of another person as readily as we are told he can do it, and if he is as smart as we have reason to believe he is, what is more likely than, having impersonated Legayah yesterday, it should occur to him that he could impersonate Nick Carter to-day?"

"Chick, you are rapidly getting me scared."

"I am scared myself—almost, when I think about it."

"But—confound it, Chick—if that was not Nick Carter who took breakfast with us this morning, wouldn't you *know* it?"

"Wouldn't *you* know it?"

"Oh, there is not so much expected of the likes of me, Chick. But with you it is different. You are a detective yourself. You are almost as good a one as Nick is. You have lived with Nick so long that—gee whiz—you ought to be able to *smell* out an impostor, like a pet dog would do it."

A pet dog!

Like a flash Chick leaped to his feet; but then he sank back again into his chair.

"What is the matter?" asked Starbuck.

"Your remark about the dog startled me. I was thinking of Pedro—our bloodhound. But he is not here. He is in the country. We could not possibly get him here before to-morrow, and we must act before that time. We must act at once."

"Act? Act how? What do you mean?"

"I mean that we must act—that is all. Where has he gone now, do you suppose?"

"Who? Nick? He said he was going for a walk."

"I know! By glory, I know! I believe I do know!"

He started from his chair again and fairly leaped across the room and seized the telephone. In an instant he had it at his ear and was calling for police headquarters.

As soon as he was answered, he asked:

"This is Chickering Carter. With whom am I talking? Is that you, inspector?"

"Yes," came the reply.

"I wish to talk with you quite confidentially for a moment. I mean that if Nick should happen to be there, or should enter while I am talking to you, you are not to tell him who I am or what I say. Will you agree to that?"

"Yes. Of course. But what is the matter with you, Chick?"

"I don't know—quite. Now tell me—is Nick there?"

"No."

"Well, I have an idea that he is on his way there at this moment. I think he will wish to see you at once when he arrives, and that he will also wish to have that man—Zanabayah, you know——"

"Yes."

"I think he will ask you to let Zanabayah depart in his custody."

"Well, suppose he should do that? Why not? There isn't really anything on earth for which we can hold him, is there?"

"He is charged with attempted murder."

"Suppose he is, you know and I know that the charge won't hold water. The minute this fellow is allowed before a magistrate, he will be discharged. He might have gotten out before this if he wasn't a foreigner, and if he knew about things. I have been expecting all along that Nick would be down after him to set him free."

"But, all the same, if Nick does arrive there within the next half-hour or so, and does make that request, I want you to do me the favor to hold the man in spite of it. Will you?"

"But why? And what do you mean by going against the wishes of your chief, young man?"

"I mean something that is especially vital, inspector. I cannot tell you what it is over the phone, and Nick will not know about it when he gets there, so you are not to tell him of this talk. But will you oblige me?"

"I don't see how I can do it, Chick."

"That isn't all, either," insisted Chick. "Nick will want you to give him an order to get that other fellow out of the Tombs——"

"He'll have to get a magistrate to do that. It is out of my jurisdiction, that is."

"Tell him so, then, and see if he does not ask you to get the order for him, or send for it for him. I don't want you to do that, either."

"If you will tell me what is up, Chick, I'll try to do what I can to oblige you, although it strikes me as rather an odd request that you make."

"If I should tell you, you would not believe me; or you would think me a fool."

"I have never thought that about you yet, lad; and I'm not likely to do so. And as for not believing you—I have yet to find out when you have lied to me."

"Well, then, I am not sure that Nick *is* Nick. I——"

"Eh? What's *that!*"

"I'm not sure that Nick *is* Nick. I am afraid that he is somebody else who is——"

"Say, Chick; you had better run around the corner and see the doctor; or go and soak your head. Get out with you!"

And that was all.

The inspector, thoroughly convinced that Chick and Nick together were trying to put up a job of some sort on him, hung up the receiver and refused to listen longer.

But Chick was not through yet.

He asked Central to give him the Tombs, and there he asked for the warden, or for whoever happened to be in charge at the moment.

It was one of the deputies who answered him, and immediately Chick asked:

"Has Nick Carter been there?"

"He has, sir. He has just gone—not ten minutes ago. Who are you?"

"I am Chick—his assistant. I am anxious to get him. Tell me what he did there, at the Tombs."

"Well, I wouldn't mind telling you, if I was sure of you; but you see, I'm not. I don't know your voice well enough to recognize it——"

"Suppose I should come what he did and ask you about it?"

"Well, that would be different, you know. I reckon there wouldn't be any difficulty about answering your questions with 'yes' or 'no.' What is it that you want to know?"

"I want to know if Mr. Carter took an order on you from one of the magistrates, directing you to deliver over to him the prisoner who is called Zanabayah?"

"Say, you're a pretty fine Mr. That is just what he did."

"And did he take the prisoner away from the Tombs with him?"

"Sure."

"That will do, thank you."

Chick returned the receiver to the hook and then sank back in his chair.

"I am right," he groaned. "The man is not Nick Carter. He is Zanabayah. I know it now."

With a bound he was upon his feet. With another he reached the door into the hall and threw it open in front of him—and then he started back in amazement.

Legayah stood upon the threshold—or just beyond it.

"I came by the roof and so down the stairs from there," he said quickly. "Who has been here with a fairy-machine? With one of the dumb-birds? Who but Zanabayah——"

"Nobody but Zanabayah. He has been here. He is impersonating my chief. He has just gone out. I was about to start after him. Hark!"

He turned and turned back again to the telephone and again he called for police headquarters, and then for the inspector.

"Inspector," he said rapidly. "This is Chick again. Please wait and hear what I have to say."

"Well, be quick, Chick. I don't want any more of your fooling. Say anything, it won't do you any good for Nick has been already. He knew in an instant, almost as you looked asking—and he's gone."

"*Gone?* Did he take the prisoner with him?"

"Sure."

"And did you tell him—*did you tell him*——"

"I told him nothing. Do you take me for a fool? What is this thing you are up to anyhow? Some sort of a joke?"

"Thank you, inspector," said Chick; and he shut off.

But he breathed a sigh of relief as he turned again toward his companions in the room, for he did not care half so much about the escape of the prisoners as he did that the man who had been instrumental in liberating them should not be informed that he was suspected.

And then, as rapidly and as concisely as he could do so, he told Legayah about all that had happened, about his suspicions and why they had been aroused; and while he talked Legayah listened intently, occasionally nodding his head in acquiescence.

"I think you are right," he said, at the conclusion of the tale.

"The man will return here," said Chick. "As the case stands now, it will not occur to him that he is suspected."

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Legayah. "However, we must wait."

CHAPTER XII.

THE POTENCY OF THE EMERALD SKULL.

"But while we are waiting," said Chick, "think of what may happen to Nick!"

"Calm yourself, my young friend," was the reply. "If anything was to happen to your beloved master, it has already been done. If Zanabayah meant to injure him it is likely that he has done so already, while if he has not injured him, there is ample time to await the coming of the human fiend here. Be patient, my friend. All will be well. Accept my assurances of that."

"And now I want to say a word," broke in Starbuck. "I want to know what you did with Idayah."

Legayah turned to him with a smile on his lips, and he said softly:

"I bring you this from your wife, the queen;" and he extended a folded note to Starbuck.

"Read it aloud," exclaimed Chick, impetuously. "We want to know everything just about now. Keep nothing back."

And Starbuck read:

"'When you receive this I will be on my way with

all speed toward the Sacred Valley, to which place I have gone gladly on the advice of Legayah. He knows that I will be safe there, and he says that my people need me. I have promised him in your name that as soon as the work is done that you have to do here, as soon as the power of Zanabayah is taken from him, you will let Legayah bring you to me there. Come to me, my husband. I shall await you with all the love of my soul and heart. . . . And, if it is possible, persuade Nick and Chick to come with you; even if it is only for a short visit on their parts. As for yourself, I have the promise of Legayah that my people will be willing that we should spend part of the time away from them, if only I will resume my place as queen over them. So come to me as soon as you can. My best love."

"You will go?" said Legayah, addressing Starbuck.

"Yes," he replied. "I will go."

The white-haired man turned to Chick again then.

"I half-expected to find trouble here when I alighted on the roof," he said. "There is one of the dumb-birds there. It has been taken apart and stored, as only my people know how to store them, compactly, and weighted down, on the roof. I suspected when I saw it that Zanabayah was up to some of his tricks, and, therefore, I was not as surprised as I perhaps might have been when you told me what has happened."

"And what shall we do now?" asked Chick. "Something must be done at once."

"Nothing can be done until Zanabayah comes," was the reply. "When he does appear, I believe that I have a way to control him. Hark!"

The street-door opened and closed, and a step was heard ascending the stairs.

A dark scowl swept across Chick's face, and, in a whisper, he said to his companions:

"If I needed anything more to convince me that this man is *not* Nick, I have it now. The step. You can imitate another man's walk, *but you cannot do it in ascending or descending stairs.* Whatever the appearance may be, the man who is approaching us now *is not Nick Carter.*"

But it was Nick Carter—apparently—who entered at the door a moment later; and Chick regarded him narrowly as he came in to the study, *for if it had really been Nick, he would have shown some displeasure at finding them all gathered there in his study.*

As it was, his only astonishment seemed to be that he found Legayah there; and it did appear for a moment as if he did not know exactly how the discovery should be regarded.

It was Legayah who set him at his ease, for, with the most natural assumption of accepting the situation, he said:

"How are you, Mr. Carter? Well, I hope. You see I have returned rather sooner than you had reason to expect me. But I preferred not to let you know the exact hour of my return, lest Zanabayah should somehow find it out also."

"And Idayah——?" asked the impostor anxiously.

"Is safe. We need not know more than that at present. For the best of reasons I prefer to keep her locality a secret from you for a time. But soon, quite soon, I will take you to her."

The pseudo detective crossed the room to the chair which the detective was in the habit of occupying, and dropped wearily into it; and Chick's lip curled in scorn at himself when he thought that this man had ever succeeded in deceiving him, even for a moment.

It was all that Chick could do to hold himself in, so that he would not spring upon the man who sat there in his chief's chair, as if he owned it and the house as well.

But he had resolved now to be guided by the resourceful man who stood beside him; and Legayah, realizing this, placed his right hand inside the breast of his coat and, holding it there, stepped around the table until he stood beside the disguised Zanabayah.

"Mr. Carter," he said, speaking mildly, "I have brought you something."

"Yes?" was the reply; and Zanabayah raised his eyes, and threw out his chin as he had often seen Nick Carter do.

"I have brought you something from Idayah, which you will prize very highly indeed; something which she sent to you with her love and best wishes, knowing that her husband would not object."

The suspicion of a flush stole into the cheeks of Zanabayah and his eyes glowed so that he half-covered them with his lids; a thing which Nick Carter never did, although Chick chose to take no notice of the mistake just then.

Legayah still held that hand in the breast-pocket of his coat; and now, Zanabayah, with a show of impatience, asked:

"What is it?"

"This!"

Legayah drew his hand from his pocket slowly, keeping it closed so that whatever it was that he held in the palm, it was not revealed at once.

But suddenly he thrust his hand forward and opened it, so that it was directly under the eyes of the impostor.

It was the emerald skull which he held in his hand.

If there had been deception before, there could be none any longer.

The instant that the eyes of Zanabayah rested upon the skull, he uttered a shout which was like a scream and he started back in such terror that he overturned the chair in which he had been seated and fell with it to the floor in a crash.

And the instant he fell Chick was upon him holding him down with his strong hands at the man's throat and his fingers digging into the flesh in a manner that few could have withstood.

"Hold him!" said Legayah and he bent forward and calmly placed the emerald skull before Zanabayah's face, forced and held it there pressing it into the flesh, where one would have supposed it was burning its way to the bone, to judge from the contortions of Zanabayah's limbs, the writhing of his face, the agony upon his countenance, and the beads of sweat that started out upon him.

Arne Chick and Scarlatta and Patsy at the door, and Tse-Lihi, who had just entered the house, looked on in silent amazement that superstition should go so far, for they remembered all that Legayah had told them about the emerald skull.

But, superstition though it was, it was also fact so far as the consequences upon the man it touched were concerned.

The superstition had said that he would be shorn of his power, and he was shorn of it.

He was as limp in their hands after that as if he were the weakest of mortals. He offered no resistance whatever when they stood him upon his feet and washed away all traces of Nick Carter from his face.

When Legayah asked him what he had done with the detective, he answered readily enough, and gave the necessary directions for finding the place, where he had already sent the two men whom he had taken from their cell at the Tombs and at headquarters.

"Good," said Legayah then. "We will go at once. I guess [illegible] which is not likely to alarm. It will make an article for the newspapers to print to-morrow; that two new flying-machines have come to your city."

And so, presently, they soared away from the roof of Nick Carter's house; but before they went to the place where Nick Carter was detained, they sailed around another spot beneath them where Legayah made signals which were seen and understood by somebody, for, when they arrived at the house in the middle of the woods where the detective had been taken, there were three other machines near them which also alighted upon the roof. They contained followers of Legayah who had accompanied him on his errand to their queen.

Zanabayah seemed now to be entirely subjugated, and when Legayah ordered him to conduct them to the room where Nick Carter was detained, he did so without offering an objection.

And as they entered the room, the five sons of Zanabayah rose up in their places at a table where they had been seated.

They would have started forward to rescue their father, but he waived his hand to them and ordered them in no uncertain tones, to remain where they were; and then, while Nick remained in his corner, able to move only his eyes, he saw Legayah pass from one to another of the sons, and finally to Zanabayah himself, and prick them all with a needle he carried in his hand; and one by one as he pricked them, they sank to the floor unconscious.

"So they will remain," he said calmly, "until I have delivered them over to the House of Nobles, in the Sacred Valley, for trial. There never will be a time to fear them again."

Then he crossed to Nick's side. He bade the detective swallow a potion that he mixed for him, and he injected a drop of fluid into his arm; and in two minutes more Nick leaped to his feet, fully recovered.

"The most exquisite suffering in the world," he said to Legayah, as he shook hands with him, "is to be entirely paralyzed and yet retain your intelligence. Now, Legayah, what shall we do with these prisoners of ours?"

"Leave them to me," was the reply. "I have means enough to return them to the Sacred Valley, and there, after they have been tried and condemned, they will find their reward in the House of Vibration."

THE END.

The next issue (539) will contain "The Women of the Mill, or Nick Carter's Quadruple Mystery."

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